

Miguel Amorós

Speeches and texts

Volume 1



1984-2008

Miguel Amorós

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October 1984

Report on the Assembly Movement

The workers assembly movement that shook Spain from 1976 to 1978 was neither more nor less than the independent manifestation of the proletariat, and as a consequence, the confirmation of the existence of the class struggle in a country where both the dictatorship as well as the politicians of the transition had fought against it for forty years by concealing it.

It was the spontaneous response of the Spanish proletariat to the political exhaustion of Francoism, superimposed on the general economic crisis then affecting the capitalist world, at the very moment when the dictatorship was attempting a controlled adaptation of its institutions to democratic forms, and the capitalist world was attempting to carry out a process of modernization of the spectacular market economy that would painlessly dissolve the second proletarian assault against class society. But this did not imply the mere rejection of a backward political regime, that is, Francoism, and even less any kind of support for an anti-Francoist replacement option. The assembly movement was an uprising against all forms of exploitation that escaped the narrow framework of bourgeois politics intended for the containment of the workers, and which exposed the anti-Francoist opposition when the latter was getting ready to negotiate for more European forms of social slavery, that is, more standardized forms, in return for a share in their management.

The return of the class organization of the proletariat, of class-consciousness, is a constant demand of direct democracy in the struggle, which is in no small measure reminiscent of the anarchist tradition of the Spanish proletariat of the past, as are the rejection of the idea of leadership vanguards, politics, trade union reformism, and of all representation separate from the class, and the practice of solidarity, self-defense, direct dialogue and the general strike as specific methods of struggle. And while it is true that the libertarian movement of the past possessed an emancipatory project and organic experience which the assembly movement lacked, the latter had the advantage of being less rhetorical, more numerous, encompassing non-industrial sectors, less anti-intellectual and more demanding of its representatives. With a more favorable starting point, it could have gone further. The assembly movement was the continuation of the workers movement under late Francoism and was contemporaneous with the movement of the Portuguese proletariat, but demonstrating a greater

revolutionary content: unlike Portugal, where the proletariat advanced unopposed, here the workers assemblies from the very beginning had to face all of their enemies, who formed a compact counterrevolution, and they had to move against everyone and everything, including their own weaknesses, the effects of which were so cruelly felt when their movement lost its force and momentum. The movement was only gradually defeated, and was still dangerous even after it had disappeared; not only because the assembly idea was never totally extirpated, but also because the Spanish democracy was constructed in opposition to the workers assembly movement, and once the latter was extinguished, all the existing political forces that attained influence precisely by virtue of their struggle against that movement — first of all the Stalinists, systematic boycotters of independent mass organization, and then the conglomerate of reformed, dissident and Jesuit Francoists, led by Suárez, as the leading party of the “transition” — were discredited and entered into a process of fatal decomposition threatening the whole transition, which was resolved in a coup. Thus arose the paradox whereby, for the PCE, the UCD and the trade unions, the workers assemblies were more dangerous dead than alive. For the workers assembly movement was the cause of their importance and their necessity, and, once the cause disappeared, so did their reason for existence. The destruction of the workers assemblies signified neither more nor less than the peaceful handing over of the country to the ruling classes and the political projects they found most suitable.

In Spain, as in Poland, the proletarians succeeded in establishing their means of communication and organization without being immediately isolated and destroyed, but while in Poland the struggle was capable of providing itself with general and unifying goals, and being translated into radical everyday initiatives, in Spain, the radical formulations of the assemblies were few and far between, the movement generally being restricted to solidarity and workplace issues. Nor could the Spanish movement count on the sympathies or the neutrality of those secondary middle classes that capitalism was creating, by means of which it was transforming social labor, those with graduate degrees, for example, the primary grounds for the recruitment of managerial personnel, or intellectuals, or the trade union bureaucracy, even considering only the leftist version of the latter, or the employees of the communications media.

In Spain, a country where capitalism is weak and incapable of great initiatives, and even less capable of keeping in its service a swarm of cadres who are not directly profitable, such as journalists, bureaucrats and intellectuals, the State engages to take care of those tasks that are of general interest for the ruling class. The only means of existence and advancement for all these subaltern

personnel is the administrative, political and cultural apparatus of the State; the purposes of the State are therefore their purposes as well. And just when the State was ready to reform itself and employ some of them, an anti-political and anti-hierarchical assembly movement arose, visibly an enemy of the State. So the proletariat, hardly having entered the fray, not only had to confront money and power, but also the politicians and ideologists of every stripe, all the careerists, the trade unions, the press, culture and even folklore. In Poland there was no such symbiotic relationship of all the non-proletarian layers with the State; the movement was favored by the generalized complicity of all social layers. In Spain the movement was hindered at every step by a generalized complicity of all other social layers against it.

The assemblies were produced by the circumstances of the time. The dictatorship, having become a lame duck government, its leadership team divided, lacking the unconditional support of the powerful sectors that were its historical justification, had lost control over Spanish society, without anyone else having taken its place. Most Francoists were aware of the fact that as soon as Franco died, his regime ceased to exist, rendering the State an empty shell, isolated and rudderless, and they realized as well that it would have to be propped up with a democratic reform. But the old Francoism, while trying to modernize, knew that it was incapable of imposing its own reforms, and even of leading the country towards them. In 1976, "democratic" Francoism made no sense. Its reform, which was not negotiated with either the opposition or with the recalcitrant Francoist families, had the virtue of disgusting the entire world and leading to increased polarization. The reformist Francoists, obliged to exercise tolerance in order to maintain credibility, made their debut with a wage freeze at the very moment when numerous labor contracts were being negotiated and prices were skyrocketing. The sudden deterioration of the economic conditions of the "greatest productive force" was the last straw for the social crisis that had been incubating for the previous few years, and the tolerance that the regime of "soft dictatorship" was forced to exercise was the gap through which the movement poured.

The strikes began in January in Madrid and slowly spread throughout the whole country, surprising everyone by virtue of their combativeness and magnitude, and above all due to the generalization of the workers assemblies, resolute and alert, organs for collective discussion and decision-making, which demonstrated the will of the workers to manage their own affairs, and not to leave them to be managed by others. The assemblies elected delegates and spread the strikes everywhere, often through simple class solidarity, and took to the streets, flouting not just the existing laws but also the official trade union

structure that the Stalinists expected to capture and all the plans of the government, the bankers and the opposition, in which the proletariat played a passive role in their transactions. Their entrance onto the scene brought about a qualitative change in the situation, bringing the existing class antagonism into the foreground. The assemblies, institutions for the defense of everyday interests, created for the purpose of discussing labor problems and selecting those given the responsibility of negotiating with the employer, became a true power, independent, with an enormous force, full of possibilities that were beginning to be apparent to many workers. In Vitoria, in February and March of 1976, the assembly movement reached its high point. If the Madrid strikes had exposed the insignificant extent of the government's opening and had convinced the employers of the need for a powerful trade union central that could control the workers, the general strike in Vitoria definitely torpedoed any gradualist reform and any project of rehabilitation, even with regard to the CCCO and the National Trade Union Central, unmasking the pact concluded by the Francoist rearguard with the opposition. The Vitoria strike was not only a key weapon of the assembly — “arms are nothing but the nature of the combatants” — but it also imposed the *representative committees* of delegates, elected and revocable, simultaneously forcing the resignation of official and informal trade unionism. The workers occupied the streets and assemblies were formed in all the different domains of public life. The movement shed its spontaneous character in order to coordinate its activities and for organizing self-defense. All the enemies of the proletariat took cognizance of these tremendously contagious revolutionary features, which could multiply and lead to a real revolution if the situation were to continue to develop in their favor. But tolerance came to an end and the workers of Vitoria were mowed down with machine guns. The government and the opposition managed to contain the revolt provoked by the police shootings to the Basque Country, and the solidarity of the workers of the rest of Spain was scattered and harshly repressed.

In Vitoria the first stage of the assembly movement ended with important results: the failure of the Francoist reform and the acceptance on the part of those in power of the inevitability of parties and trade unions, which would have to be legalized, since they were the only creditable buffers available at the time; the unification of the Stalinist and socialist opposition in a joint platform, the Democratic Coordination, which would have to negotiate the political reform and the social pact — the “agreed break” — with a government that would hold elections. Those in power were afraid that the workers would reflect upon the end of tolerance and coordinate their activities by providing

themselves with a strong autonomous organization that would overcome the difficulties of their beginnings and successfully confront their enemies-allies. They had to find the way to unite all their problems in one, which would demand an immediate solution, or, in other words, they had to unify their demands in a coherent revolutionary project. Some of the necessary tasks were vividly felt, such as that of autonomous organization, and in many factories the workers organized outside the trade unions, but their degree of coordination never extended beyond their immediate surroundings, except for brief periods. Only a few industries formed links at a provincial level, but were unable to prevent many assemblies that were manipulated by leftists from voting for the formation of unitary trade unions and many delegate committees were transformed into embryonic trade unions. Only in Vizcaya was it possible to create a *Unitary Coordination of Factory Assemblies*, which organized huge mobilizations. The strikes continued but they no longer spread so easily as before because they had to confront the C.O.S., an ad-hoc association of the leading central committees, launched in September 1976 for the purpose of establishing a climate of social peace that would provide a favorable environment for the meetings underway between the opposition and the government of Suárez. Instead, strikes took place that had a more assemblyist and anti-trade union character, for obvious reasons, and which were more violent, because they had to face the forces of repression. Sure of the opposition, the employers tried to recover the ground lost in the previous strikes, with the help of the government, which authorized the wage freeze and layoffs. The repression led to more fatalities and called forth an immediate reaction from the workers, precipitating a hot autumn. This second stage of the assembly movement ended with the week of November 12, after which the balance between the assemblyist proletarians and the trade union bureaucrats tipped in favor of the latter, and the movement entered a phase of isolation and dispersion.

The alliance between liberal sectors of the bourgeoisie, socialists and Stalinists had no other purpose than the need for a peaceful political evolution of the Francoist regime, and sought nothing more than dialogue with the latter. Its strategy was based on strengthening this evolution, and to achieve agreements of the kind that were actually implemented. Any factor that disturbed this process, such as, for example, the class struggle, upset the plans of the opposition, because it frightened the Francoists and alienated the bourgeois representatives. The proletariat was supposed to limit itself to a supporting role, echo the slogans of the Stalino-bourgeois conclave and docilely line up behind its self-proclaimed leaders. The working class therefore had to draw the

necessary conclusions and treat the politico-trade unionist bureaucracy without respect, as enemies of the same kind as Francoism. The workers constituted a power that aroused the hostility of all, and faced with the perspectives such a situation provided, either asserted their autonomy or surrendered to the usurpation: "either assemblies or trade unions". This is how the most radical elements perceived the question. The problem of the Spanish revolution — and of all modern revolutions — resides at the very root of this controversy: to recognize or not to recognize the independent role of the proletariat, and to act accordingly. Which is what the workers never had to do after the events of November 12, when, in exchange for satiating their bellicose enthusiasm with a massive anti-Francoist demonstration, they surrendered the leadership of the movement, and the mobilization became a test of trade union discipline that was crowned with success. All the strikes that took place afterwards had the police in front of them and the trade unions at their back.

The strikes of the third stage of the assembly movement, which lasted until the legalization of the trade unions on April 28, 1977, were isolated in an environment created by a secret agreement entered into by the employers and the trade unions, between the opposition and the government, the workers having lost the initiative. They were long strikes, totally independent of the trade unions, all of which ended in defeat. They were nonetheless exemplary strikes, all capable of reversing the correlation of forces for a certain period of time and any one of which could have served to reanimate the movement if it had become generalized. But this was now very difficult, and the few initiatives that were undertaken for this purpose, such as the commemoration of the anniversary of the events that took place at Vitoria and the celebration of May Day, failed. The post-Franco regime opened the doors of administration and politics to the parties and the middle classes, people who were conscious of their specific class interests for the first time, positions that could by no means be acquired through the workers revolt. During this time the PCE represented the interests of such classes, heirs of the historical role once played by the *petit bourgeoisie*; it had obtained the support of the most politically backward sectors of the workers, and had ideologically disarmed the most radical sectors, thereby becoming the vanguard of the party of order in 1977. As the boss of this party, its secretary Carrillo was introduced to the Twenty First Century Club and to its national capitalist elites by Fraga. The presence of the PCE and the trade unions, favored by those in power, was further reinforced by the ongoing divergence between the workers' everyday interests and their real class interests, leading to a situation where the proletariat did not unanimously confront the ruling class and, as a result of the impact of the economic crisis that had been

steered so as to primarily affect the workers, their solidarity flagged and their class consciousness became obscured. It was then enough for the remains of Francoism to counterattack by fomenting anti-reformist reactions in the military and by resort to the strategy of tension, like the Italian fascists, so that the opposition threw itself into the arms of the renovated Francoist government, disorienting and demoralizing the proletariat. This sacred union was perfected after the January 15 elections with a calamitous social pact.

The Moncloa Agreement of September 1977 was a united front of all the government parties against a possible proletarian offensive they feared would be triggered by the exacerbation of the economic situation. For the first time, the trade unions were publicly recognized as strikebreakers and scabs, as being responsible for the domestication of the working class and for subjecting it to the “natural” laws of production that guaranteed the rule of capital over labor. Until then, their victories over the assemblies had been ephemeral, because these victories were not accompanied by the material benefits that would confer prestige upon them; quite the contrary was more often true: each trade union intervention was a disaster for the workers’ standard of living, and thus all their stalling tactics were always a hair’s breadth away from causing an undesired reactivation of the assembly movement. The movement had persisted in the Basque Country, where it enjoyed the support of the nationalists. Between July and September, the shoe factory workers in the province of Alicante provided the best example of assembly organization ever witnessed. After the Moncloa Agreement the paradoxical situation arose whereby despite having defeated the assembly movement, the trade unions and parties were not rewarded with all the advantages they sought and, when they tried to rectify this situation, they lost what they had already gained. All the important strikes that took place after this conjuncture were, in one way or another, strikes against the Agreement. In October 1977, in Cadiz, the *Coordinadora de Trabajadores* (Workers Coordination) swept the city, as in Vitoria, and in November huge demonstrations were held in protest against the Agreement in the big cities, the movement culminating one month later with the general strikes in Vizcaya and Tenerife. Many employers had to bypass the trade unionists and accept the delegates elected by the assemblies. This fourth stage of the assembly movement, however, did not conclude with a rejuvenation of direct democracy in the factories and the streets, but with its near-disappearance, as was made obvious after January 16, 1978, when the first trade union elections were held. Afterwards dialogue among the rank and file and direct representation came to an end. One could henceforth no longer speak of assemblyism except as an increasingly minoritarian tendency among the workers, as the ensemble of practices that were increasingly marginalized and criminalized by their enemies.

From then on, the working class was to play a very minor role in the succeeding events.

The workers assemblies made their enemies retreat on several occasions, but did not occupy the terrain that the latter surrendered. The movement, lacking cohesion, was worn down, without general goals, without being able to deliver decisive blows. The absence of a definite revolutionary current among the assemblyists was a factor that contributed even more to the confusion that came to prevail. The assembly movement had gone so far that it became necessary for it to understand its deeds and the consequences thereof. In order to advance after having gone into battle, it had to protect itself from recuperation, perfecting its organization and defining its tasks. When the opportunity to move to a higher stage of struggle against Capital and the State presented itself, class instinct was not enough: class-consciousness is the decisive factor: knowledge of the conditions of the struggle as a whole, the clear understanding of reality, precise judgment of the capitalist social order. The proletariat's fight against class society obliges it to take on the problem of understanding itself. Parallel with the economic struggle, a struggle over consciousness also develops, a struggle for the understanding of society. Historical social knowledge, the acquisition of social consciousness, also signifies the possibility of rule over society, or social emancipation, if the proletariat emerges victorious from this struggle. Both struggles are intertwined, and each is real only if the other accompanies it. The sole precondition for this to be fulfilled is the autonomous action of the proletariat. If the proletariat does not succeed in making itself independent of representations external to it, its process of emancipation falters and comes to an end. This is the principal lesson of the assembly movement.

Miguel Amorós, October 1984.

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Strikes that give the impression we are winning

“Victory over foreigners calls for praise,
victory over Greeks for mourning.”
(Gorgias)

Do the general strikes that have taken place since that well-known 14-D [the Spanish general strike of December 14, 1988—translator’s note] in Spain and all across Europe up to the French December of 1995 form part of a revolt against globalization, or are they the clear proof of the evaporation — now we would call it virtualization — of the class struggle? Before responding to this question we shall call attention to something that we could not help but notice about these strikes: the total return to normal on the day after the strike. It seemed that strikes, like witches, are no longer seen anywhere, but since they used to exist they must be there somewhere.

There were neither discussions, nor new organizational processes, nor long-term struggles that would have been evidence of an advance in the consciousness of its protagonists. That is why we are inclined to think that they are not real strikes at all, or else that they ended up not being real strikes, that authentic strikes no longer take place, like the ones of the past. The real question is: How can working class strikes exist today if the working class does not exist, if the workers do not exist as a specific social class? Anyone who tries to explain the present with concepts that are applicable only to the reality of the past, only labors on behalf of spreading confusion and for the preservation of the prevailing order. Perhaps someone will remind us of the spontaneous and autonomous practices of the rank and file movements, of an instance of radicalism, of a particular assembly ... but all of this was without significance, it remained on the terrain of labor, in the sphere of the trade unions, it is necessarily self-limiting and enters into a one-sided competition with the trade unions until it degenerates into just another trade union or else disappears. The illusion of a real workers movement, outside the boundaries of the major trade union federations, can at present be generated only by the trade unions themselves, as an often-utilized maneuver to divert attention for a specific purpose. Today, the condition of wage labor is generalized and, in this sense, almost everyone is a worker, exploited, given orders, dispossessed or

contaminated, but this does not mean that they all form part of a historical subject or a class, with a certain predisposition to revolution, a particular historical mission or destiny. It just means that they are numbered among those who “can vote, but not choose”, as J. Estefanía said (a high level executive of *El País*). It is true that there is a remnant class, linked to the old industrial production, that is, to the previous period of capitalism, that is well on its way to retirement. The one that still displays itself to us in the pathetic parades on the First of May singing “The Internationale”. In any event, a relic from the days before globalization.

“Few things are more symptomatic of the decay of the workers’ movement than its failure to notice this” (Adorno, *Minima Moralia*). When we speak of the proletariat we are referring to that anomalous mass of people — blue collar workers, civil servants, office workers, declining middle class, executives, retirees, unemployed, people on public assistance, youth, etc. — separated from each other by contrasting and divergent material interests and whose only common bond is that of depending on a wage or a subsidy. The development of capitalism has so radically altered the proletarian social structure that the wage earning masses have ceased to be an agent of historical transformation. This unconsolidated social conglomerate cannot be the negation of capitalism. It is in the same situation as the peasantry described by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*: it comprises an enormous mass of people who live practically identically, but without being united by way of the establishment of multiple interrelations. Their jobs and the modern spectacle isolate them from each other, instead of leading them towards reciprocal relations. At present, the exploitation of labor does not permit any variety of talents, or any wealth of social relations. They live in material conditions that separate them from one another, and if we restrict our attention to the way they live, then in this sense they constitute a class. They are not a class however, insofar as there is no social bond between them, and insofar as the similarity of their interests does not create any community among them, much less a specific organization. They are therefore incapable of defending their alleged class interests, they cannot represent themselves and they have to be represented by an external bureaucratic class. It is from this bureaucratic class that their leaders arise, who they assume are obliged to protect their interests and to decide what is best for them. The political influence of the wage workers finds its ultimate expression in the subordination of society to politicians, that is, to the state and its executive power. The modern proletarian condition, by its very nature, basically serves the bureaucracy whose base of operation is the state, it serves the party of the state, and transforms the wage workers into a conservative force, an agent of

order. Their simulated struggles are only a private affair and do not represent general interests. They are nothing but political nullity and boredom because the working class no longer exists in opposition to the dominant system, but forms part of it. The dispensable part.

According to the textbooks, globalization is “that stage of capitalism in which national economies are gradually integrated into the framework of the international economy, so that their development will increasingly depend on the international markets and less on government economic policies”. From the very beginning, globalization was preceded by a generalized reconstruction of industry — the “reconversion” of the eighties — and accompanied by a no less generalized automation of the production process, resulting in the elimination of a large number of jobs and the expulsion of the majority of the workers towards the margins of production or directly into the unemployment line. Globalization has not witnessed the rise of an international proletariat that confronts Capital on a larger battlefield: the entire world. We should ask ourselves how all of this could have been imposed with so little social opposition and how it could have given rise to so few commentaries and rumors. We would have to talk about the degradation of consciousness that led to the inability of the proletariat to carry out its revolution, the failure of its assaults on class society and the effectiveness of the ruling classes, who knew how to address the question of working conditions, that is, by making them worse, playing with petty political and trade union privileges without arousing any insuperable opposition. One way or another, the proletariat is dissolving into an amorphous mass, without rights and badly paid, of part-time, temporary and unemployed workers, a simple domestic servant of production, the reserve army of labor against itself. Furthermore, the machines, having been designed by experts, are beyond the control of the workers, so that strikes have less and less impact on an unusable and inaccessible system of production; we could say that this is the end of the proletariat, that the proletariat has died. And what has been born is a class of servants “whose sole office is fatuously to wait upon the person of their owner, and so to put in evidence his ability unproductively to consume a large amount of service” (Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*). Today’s wage workers are incapable, by virtue of their situation, of creating an organized autonomous movement, and the old workers and civil servants will only get involved in a corporative movement. But someone may object, and say that there really were general strikes. Not at all; they were simply demonstrations of the capacity for control exercised by the trade union apparatus that took place because the process of the

homogenization of labor was being implemented unilaterally and had affected some of the trade unions' prerogatives.

Capital and wage labor are just two aspects of the same social relation and one grows in pace with the other. The increase in labor, however, does not necessarily imply an increase in the number of workers. Thanks to the development of autonomous technology, the demand for labor by no means corresponds with the demand for workers. "For capital, the worker does not constitute a condition of production, but only labor. If this can be performed by machinery, or even by water or air, so much the better" (Marx, *Pre-Capitalist Economic Formations*). The old revolutionary demand for the abolition of labor is realized and turned against the workers. Capitalist society is based on the exploitation of wage labor and labor that is not carried out by machines is what is disappearing from the stage of history. So those in power are now talking about sharing the work that remains. From Clinton's advisors to the critical sector of the CCOO, the constant refrain is a shorter workweek, part time work, make-work projects, work in alternating periods, the return to piecework, etc. Measures that are intended to dissimulate the fact that the future will bring about the near-extinction of wage labor and this, under the existing conditions, implies over the short-term the pauperization of the majority of humanity. A whole urban underclass has appeared, warehoused in ghettos, composed of those who are not capable of being integrated into the market, the excluded, the marginalized, the really poor, rejected and forced to remain on the margins of the economy and yet in the heart of abundance. They comprise a mass of test-subjects for other kinds of economics and politics devoted to making poverty profitable, since poverty has come to stay. For the first time in history, the powerful do not need enormous masses of working class people. The masses exist in excess. They are superfluous for the market. On the other hand, labor is the sole value of modern society, which is a society of workers. Society does not recognize any other kind of activity more noble and meaningful in whose cause labor would deserve to be liberated and there is no longer any social group that is the bearer of other values, on the basis of which it could restore the other human capacities. "What we are confronted with is the prospect of a society of laborers without labor, that is, without the only activity left to them. Surely, nothing could be worse" (Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*).

Marxism's weakest point was the identification of the proletarian revolution with the economy. With the automation of production the main productive forces are the machines; the proletariat was soon revealed to be an unnecessary class. The part of it that serves as capital is constantly diminishing. The productive forces and the mode of production are no longer in conflict with one another. What

comes out of the factory is no longer the product of the collective labor of a large number of workers; no one can say: "We made this ourselves, therefore it is ours". Production loses its social character. Thus the conflict that resides in the heart of society, between social production and capitalist appropriation, disappears, and does not correspond to the antagonism between workers and employers, that is, it no longer adopts the form of the class struggle. Therefore, "socialism", whatever that may be, is no longer "the necessary outcome of the struggle between two historically developed classes" (Engels, *Socialism: Utopian and Scientific*). There is not, and there never will be, a crisis caused by this conflict that would provide a framework of action to a working class that is increasingly indistinct, which, driven forward by objective historical necessity, carries out its revolution and emancipates society from servitude.

With the globalization of the economy, the transnational economic powers that rule the market govern, while the government manages. The end of politics — the only politics is the economy — and the end of the nation state, tariffs, and national currencies. We are not claiming that, in the past, politics and economics were separate and independent realities. Since the post-war Keynesian period, State and Capital have acted symbiotically, based on the existence of national labor markets and protected national capitalisms. This merger, assisted by trade unionism and the working class parties, assumed the form of "the Welfare State", "the heart of modern European civilization", if we are to believe the journalist from *Le Monde*, Ignacio Ramonet: pensions, health insurance, unemployment insurance, the right to education, laws protecting the rights of labor, etc. And this is the heart that globalization is trying to tear out by establishing an international labor market and demanding reductions in government spending, which amounts to a demand for a minimal state. Even with regard to questions of public order, the emphasis is on private police forces. It is therefore not at all surprising that, confronted by this modern capitalist anarchism, those whose power is derived from the state—politicians, trade union officials or other intermediaries, such as environmentalists or NGOs — or who have preserved a less degraded status as workers thanks to its laws — civil servants or the old working class in process of liquidation, that is, the retirees—have experienced a profound nostalgia for the state and advocate, if not a return to the idyllic conditions of consumption and enjoyment of power of the previous period of capitalism, the nationalist period, at least a form of globalization that respects the most important elements of those conditions, by way of an agreement with a state towards which they stand in the relation of clients and which they do not want to see reduced. The function of the modern state, however, is to defend the external conditions of the capitalist mode of

production precisely against the attacks of the workers, rather than to protect the workers against the attacks of the capitalist mode of production. This, let us say, workers aristocracy feels as if, as they say, it is wearing two hats. Its members are simultaneously workers and minority shareholders. They work and combat the reduction in value of their only “capital”. Their interests are separate and distinct from those of the rest of the dispossessed and that is why their struggle — the trade union struggle, and its obtuse statism — cannot be the struggle of all. If it were to manifest its power convincingly it might be taken seriously by the rest of the wage workers, but why stop just at the culminating moment of the struggle? Why impose the sordid arguments of survival? These questions will be answered with another question: What would they do if they were victorious? If they do not know or do not want to answer, it is better to negotiate and stage a diversion with simulacra of combat, and in the end, be content with what they give you.

One of the aspects of any important strike of the past that was of most concern to the class conscious workers was that of information, which they undertook to organize with autonomous zeal to counteract the disinformation or the silence of the mainstream media. Now, these same media are instead the primary mouthpieces of the strikes and their best guardians. Their function remains the same, that of concealing reality by presenting a substitute reality, but whereas in the past this involved hiding the existence of the class struggle, now that there is no proletariat of any significance, their function is to conceal its non-existence. If in the past the media staged its invisibility, now it stage-manages its spectacle. In societies ruled by modern conditions of production a strike is not a strike if it is not announced on television. The pamphlet and the poster are no longer in evidence. The general strike only exists as a spectacle and its organization is not so much the responsibility of the trade union apparatus as of the communications media. They call the strike, they cover its progress and they put the period on the end of it outside the doors of the meeting halls. Here only actors who know their parts are permitted: the leaders are realists; the strikers, responsible; the authorities, earnestly seeking dialogue; the demands of the workers, just; the slogans, moderate; the pickets, informative; and finally, the uncontrollables, regrettable. The ideal would be for demonstrations to be covered just like, for example, the major events in the lives of the royal family. When they have already successfully exiled the entire population from reality, the most real reality is the spectacle itself. “To make shame more shameful still by making it public” is today a meaningless slogan, because once the real is no longer perceived, nothing has any consequences; making something public is just so much noise. All reference points have been lost and indifference to reality prevails. Communication is only

possible as an illegal, anti-spectacular act, carried out between those who are outside of the law.

After everything we have said, someone may ask: Are workers struggles legitimate? Are they worth the trouble? There can be no objection to the continuation of workers struggles, especially if they dispense with intermediaries and avoid the nets of the media and legal arbitration. The power of a conflict can be measured by the system's efforts to conceal or to silence it. Boycotting the communications media is a guarantee of effectiveness and its opposite, a proof of innocuousness. The problem, however, consists in the fact that the labor question no longer constitutes the core of the social question and, as a result, struggles in this domain do not necessarily proceed according to plan: they do not supersede their condition. Wage labor has to be considered as a harmful phenomenon, just like pollution, adulterated food or the greenhouse effect, so destructive that it even leads to addiction, and every struggle on its terrain must be, in order to go to the heart of the matter, a struggle against wage labor, that is, the struggle against wage labor and the social system based on the wage relation must be an implicit feature of its critique. It has to be an anti-economic and anti-state struggle. It must be a form of sabotage. Just as insubordination is an act of sabotage against the army or squatting is an act of sabotage against private property. Sabotage is the tactic for our times.

Is it not true, however, that the thirty-five hour week and the European Summit on Employment resulted directly from workers protests? These political measures did not create any jobs, any more than the forty-hour week or part-time labor contracts. It was all a public relations stunt. It just means that the statist faction of the party of order is victorious in France and Italy, and that it is the duty of this faction to defend the process of eliminating jobs by fostering the illusion of their creation. This illusion has been called by various names: Market with State, New Social Contract, Market Socialism, etc. Without exception, however, the measures that are supposed to bring us closer to these "utopias" have led to increases in overtime, off-the-books work and wage reductions, all carried out to the tune of the song, *Lavorare meno per lavorare tutti* ["Work less so that everyone works" — Translator's note].

The end of the class struggle is not the end of history; we face the paradoxical situation of an acceleration of the historical process that is being driven by anti-historical social forces. History has been obscured. In less than two decades, the classes, the parties that claimed to represent them and the social terrain itself have been vaporized. The same process has caused society to become a basket case and revolt, invisible. We get the impression that history has stopped, that things

happen without anything really happening. Nothing, however, is really taking place; all that is seen is pure representation and spectacle, and what takes place in reality is not seen. For the condition *sine qua non* of reality in the society of the spectacle is secrecy. The real workers struggles began when the strikes ended; when a spectacle comes to an end, however, it is completely finished. Until the next one comes. Domination has set itself the task of producing the typical individuals of mass society, isolated, amorphous and manipulable, displaying the behavior to be expected from creatures in captivity, who together comprise a resigned majority, unified thanks to the spectacle, within which rebellion is nullified. There is only one way to put an end to it: to acquire the determination to oppose it, to think that something better is possible. But this is a eminently individual decision and, by not respecting the rules of the spectacle, a criminal one as well. In this sense the rebel finds himself in a position similar to that of the Soviet dissident within the Stalinist system. The definitive solution will require many people to say no, but the road to that conclusion has to begin one individual at a time. And "any man more right than his neighbors constitutes a majority of one already" (Thoreau, "Civil Disobedience").

Miguel Amorós.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

"Las huelgas que cuentan que ganamos"

The Social War in Memory

“There was a war, apparently not very well known, and hardly at all here, where it took place; in more distant lands it was considered very important, and while it lasted it attracted the attention, which was not unmixed with hope, of princes, friends and enemies, near and far; first covertly and inconspicuously, and finally openly, some with fear and alarm, and others discreetly, with subtlety and craft.”

Diego Hurtado de Mendoza, *Guerra de Granada* (1610)

A few years ago, a television program, “Memories of the Transition”, was broadcast and subsequently released as a videotape, produced by an employee of the communications media who, in compensation for the services he performed on behalf of the history of power, saw how his work was unanimously acclaimed and marketed with guarantees of large profits. It was just one contribution among many others (the “memoires” of retired politicians, for example, or the carefully-selected and self-serving secrets confided to journalists working on their behalf) to the paralysis of memory and therefore of history; an example of what Debord called *unanswerable lies*. The political period spanning 1975 to 1981, corresponding to the diligent replacement of the Spanish ruling class after the death of Franco, known by the name of the “Transition”, was presented as a carousel of changing personalities who, discreetly, from office to office and from meeting to meeting, with the invaluable assistance of the selfless efforts of media gossips and the ambiguous toleration of the highest levels of the state, cobbled together the new political system of domination. When the masses appear they do so as background extras, always ready to follow the prudent and wise orders of their leaders, the absolute protagonists of the spectacle of history in their role as its exclusive masters. This history, reduced to a chronology of power, spiced with backroom anecdotes and gossip, illustrates the extent to which individuals have been expropriated of time, where they are only present as objects and where historical life is monopolized by the real elites and their representatives. It was not always like this; this usurpation had an origin, it is itself historical, which is why the function of the charlatans of the mass media consists not so much in telling us who is who in the ruling class of *other times* and rehabilitating one or another bad reputation along the way, as in concealing the moment of this usurpation, and denying the existence of autonomous social movements that took place not that long ago. Domination strives to bring about the disappearance of historical

knowledge, because the knowledge of history is the only way that, by bringing the past into the present, the comprehension of what is new becomes possible, and therefore, it allows the elaboration of proposals to transform society on emancipatory bases. As Ibn Khaldun said concerning the diverse forms of historical falsification, *“charlatans possess in the arts of knowledge a very broad field of endeavor: the meadows of ignorance are always ready for their labors”*. Someone might object that, in the final reckoning, it is after all the facts that count. With the spectacle, however, the facts themselves pass into clandestinity. Not only is the road to reality crowded with obstacles placed there by falsification, but the road itself is indiscernible. There is no critical opinion, because there is no public space or media where such an opinion could take shape and be manifested, and in such conditions, everything remains the same. The spokesmen of the spectacle can film, say or write whatever they want, and can do so whenever they want, at the time of commemorative celebrations, for example. Since the facts rapidly become obsolete amidst the avalanche of information, the falsification that serves power brings them up to date, reinventing them if necessary, in accordance with the totalitarian method. As Orwell wrote in 1984:

“All history was a palimpsest scraped clean and rewritten as often as was necessary. In no case would it have been possible, once the deed was done, to prove that any falsification had taken place.”

The perpetual present is the basis of modern society; the abundance of pseudo-events reaches such a point of banalization that it simultaneously abolishes and distorts time: once memory disappears, all past events recede into the antiquity of the epoch of the Patriarchs. Facts such as May '68, the Portuguese revolution of 1974 or the assembly movement of the Spanish workers of 1976-78, all seem strangely remote, as if they had not really occurred; and even though tens of thousands of people participated in them, almost all of them still alive, it is extremely difficult to provide an account of these events that makes any sense, an account that recalls them as recent episodes of the social war, as moments of a historical process. Likewise, if we consult the entry under “Italy” in an encyclopedia or a digest of current affairs, or if we stumble across some ephemera concerning 1977-78 in the press, we may be sure that we will encounter the kidnapping of Moro, an inexplicable terrorism and, at most, Negri and the Red Brigades. No one would ever know that the Movement of '77 was a movement without leaders, the most profound subversive movement of modern times, nor will there be any discussion of the situation that was most pregnant with revolutionary possibilities that ever arose in modern capitalism, which is why no one will ever be able to acquire the least understanding of the stage-managed State terrorism — the “strategy of tension” — or the essentially

counterrevolutionary function of the so-called communist party and the trade unions; nor the manipulative role of the communications media or that of partial and recuperative contestation; nor the disastrous effect of the pseudo-debate about armed struggle or the depressing spectacle of the “dissociated” and the “repentant”, the ultimate consequence of the armed struggle, and, finally, no one will know anything about the decisive role played by drugs in the acceleration of the decomposition of the rebel milieu.

All of these things are the results of a series of proletarian defeats; the loss of memory is merely one aspect of the corollary of defeat, the disappearance of revolutionary thought: “*memory, as such, is only the extrinsic mode, the unilateral moment of the existence of thought*” (Hegel). Nothing escapes falsification and trivialization — which is inflicted on both the insurrectionary strike in Vitoria as well as the Seville Expo — except due to the stubborn efforts of a handful of people who practice the subversive activity par excellence in these dark times: memory. Memory is the best weapon to reconstruct a community of rebels, however restricted it might be, the only place where autonomous communication is possible. With it one recovers historical points of reference and the new constestatory movements can consider their activity as the continuation of the previous wave of subversion, and inscribe it in the course of history. Then, by confronting the unilateral discourse of power that only speaks of the imperatives of the economy and technological progress, and refuting its version of the facts, to the extent that they are capable of re-appropriating the past and controlling their present—the mission of historical memory, recalling Hegel, “*is the pure comprehension of what has been and what is, events and actions*”—they will pave the way for the unification of the struggles where they will have to create, *ab ovo*, the conditions for an anti-economic secession of larger groups that will allow for the appearance of conscious history.

Miguel Amorós

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Primitivism and History

1. The Sect of the Dog

Back in the middle of the Fourth Century B.C., a vagabond philosopher lived in Athens and Corinth, a philosopher who employed extravagant gestures and a provocative attitude to preach the rejection of all civilized conventions and a return to nature and spontaneity. Diogenes the Cynic, originally from Sinope, a city on the shores of the Black Sea, practiced what he preached: he lived in a clay jar, he neither voted nor participated in any other way in a citizen's duties, he had no fixed occupation and attended to both the "matters of Aphrodite" (sex) and the "matters of Demeter" (eating) in public. He went about with his staff and his coarse blanket, which served as his clothing by day and his bedding by night, and a wallet containing the simple items of his frugal diet that he acquired by begging, which never included cooked food. Criticizing the false idols that ruled the lives of his contemporaries, or the democratic institutions that had been perverted by tyrants and demagogues, or the social hypocrisy concealed behind allegedly sacred values, he opposed the laws of nature to those of society and chose the animals as his model, seeking freedom in a life without encumbrances outside the confines of the *polis*, far from its laws and prejudices. He laughed at exile, the worst punishment that could be inflicted on a Greek, and proclaimed that he was a citizen of the world; he said, "*the only true commonwealth is that of the universe*". He also rejected property and the family and advocated the community of goods, women and children:

"What I possess is not mine. Relatives, friends, family, fame, familiar places, lifestyle, all these things are foreign to me." [I was unable to locate an English-language source text for this quotation; it appears to be a paraphrase — Translator's note.]

Under the law of nature, men, women and animals were equals, and therefore all varieties of incest are legal (a minor detail of free love), because they are natural, and even cannibalism is legal ("*because all elements are contained in all things, and pervade everything*"). Violence, however, the source of all evils, was not legal under the law of nature, nor was the idea of the fatherland or money. Harmony with the universe would be the necessary result of the abolition of war and warriors, and of money and patriotism. Along the same lines, Epicurus, the founder of a later school of thought, discouraged his disciples from submitting to the regular Greek educational curriculum and condemned participation in

politics. Like Diogenes, he was addressing the cosmopolitan individual, that great invention of the Greek world, and proposed that individuals withdraw from the public realm and live a quiet life surrounded by friends and lovers, based on a simple diet, the satisfaction of natural desires and the enjoyment of genuine pleasures, that is, wisdom and the absence of pain.

The teachings of the philosophical school of the Cynics, which include the teachings of Diogenes, therefore constituted the first primitivist critiques of civilization. Their appearance at the end of the classical period of Greece, in the midst of the full-blown crisis of the *polis*, reflected the contrast between the letter of the law and the dreary reality of everyday life. The civil wars between Sparta and Athens led to the collapse of the values of Greek civilization. The meanings of words changed and the civic virtues were transformed into their opposites due to the greed for power and partisan politics. Corruption and partisan conflicts had free rein. According to Thucydides:

“Thus religion was in honour with neither party; but the use of fair phrases to arrive at guilty ends was in high reputation. Meanwhile the moderate part of the citizens perished between the two, either for not joining in the quarrel, or because envy would not suffer them to escape.” (*The Peloponnesian Wars*)

Shortly before this era, during the early period of Hellenism, the Greek cities suffered under the oppression of organized power and the favored classes. At that time, no one felt that the laws protected them and therefore no one felt like a member of a civil community. Hegel said that, “*for philosophy to arise among a people, a rupture must take place in the actual world.*” Man takes refuge in thought when public life no longer satisfies him, when moral life has dissolved. The Greeks began to think about nature when they lost all interest in their world and everything around them was turbulent and unhappy. This phenomenon is not at all surprising. The Greeks did not conceive of man as emancipated from the universe or separated from nature, and thus they perceived no opposition between nature and man. The universe was an ordered world, the source of just relations, a model in which one could discover the social order “*that is in conformance with nature*”. The works of men could not be superior to the works of nature; at most, they could approach perfection to the extent that they inserted themselves into nature and reflected its order. With regard to this question, Epicurus said:

“If you do not on every occasion refer each of your actions to the ultimate end prescribed by nature, but instead of this in the act of choice or avoidance turn to some other end, your actions will not be consistent with your theories.”

The *polis* was a system based on the cosmic laws, a natural system that had been perverted, and had become something foreign, or “barbarous”. It was

therefore “more Greek” to return to nature. Given the absence of the historical dimension of time among the Greeks, the end was only the beginning. The Romans experienced this same state of mind when the Republic fell. During the subsequent stage, that of the Roman Empire, the primitivist refusal underwent a resurgence as a myth in literature and as a reality in the periphery of the empire.

2. The Golden Age

During the Third Century B.C., Zeno the Stoic began his career with a description of a society in which there were no differences of personal status, or racial distinctions, or party politics, a kind of egalitarian world community devoted to sun worship. Ever since the time of Hesiod there was a primitivist tendency in Greek thought that conceived of life as it was lived in the distant past as the reign of Pan, a golden age of abundance, innocence and happiness. The poets sang of the Happy Isles inhabited by “*heliopolitans*”, and thanks to the historian Diodorus Siculus we know that flowers and fruits were plentiful there, and that nothing was owned by anybody; that everyone took turns using land, food and tools, and it goes without saying that promiscuity was generalized. Theocritus situated the pastoral scene in Sicily, but it was a rugged and inhospitable region of central Greece, Arcadia, that ultimately came to embody the myth of the original happy condition. Virgil, in his *Eclogues*, describes Arcadia as containing lush vegetation, perfect for meditation, in eternal spring, without suffering, where everything is leisure and love:

“Far from discord and weapons, the land that is so prodigal for justice provides an easy living.... Man has to do no more than pick the fruit from the branches and farmland is produced for his benefit spontaneously. He enjoys a repose without disturbance and an existence that is rich in various resources.” [This appears to be a paraphrase rather than a quotation from the *Eclogues* — Translator’s note.]

Ovid, in his *Metamorphoses*, provides a similar version of the beginnings of history, of the times “*before Saturn was deposed by Jupiter*”:

“When Man yet new, /No rule but uncorrupted reason knew: /And, with a native bent, did good pursue. /Unforc’d by punishment, un-aw’d by fear, /His words were simple, and his soul sincere;/Needless was written law, where none oppress’d... /The teeming Earth, yet guiltless of the plough, /And unprovok’d, did fruitful stores allow.”

Saturn had to take refuge in Italy with its first inhabitants and according to Pompeius Trogus:

“The first inhabitants of Italy were the Aborigines, whose king, Saturn, is said to have been a man of such extraordinary justice, that no one was a slave in his reign, or had any private property, but all things were common to all, and undivided, as one estate for the use of every one....”

The aspiration for happiness derived not from the impossible idea that a new society could be built, but from the evocation of a primeval paradise that would recur at the conclusion of a cycle that was characterized by decline and ruin. For the Roman Empire, this cycle began in the Third Century. From then on Gaul and Spain experienced massive uprisings of outcasts known as the *bagaudae* that could not be suppressed by large armies. The *bagaudae* were fugitive slaves, military deserters, impoverished dependent farmers, and city dwellers fleeing the destruction of the cities, who fled to the forests seeking the freedom that they could not enjoy in civilization. There, they formed gangs that expropriated landlords and besieged the cities, managing their internal affairs by means of a “natural” justice that was unrelated to that of the Empire, without magistrates or governors. In a dialogue that has been preserved from that era (*Querolus*), a citizen asks his *lares* to guide him to a place where he can be happy. They responded by telling him to go to the Loire Valley, the territory of the *bagaudae*, because

“Men live there under natural law. There is no suffering there. Capital sentences are proclaimed under the oaks and are engraved in bone. There, even the country people speak and the ordinary people pass judgment. You can do as you please....”

This is an account of the first primitivist revolt in history.

Neither the disintegration of the Empire nor the Germanic invasions destroyed the Greco-Roman world. It was the radical transformation with regard to how the world was viewed that was propagated by Christianity that was really responsible for the destruction of the Greco-Roman world. The gods abandoned the universe, which was now the exclusive creation of God, and cosmic harmony was broken for the benefit of man, who was made in God’s image. The anthropocentrically interpreted world was devalued and reality lost its substance in favor of the beyond. This was a transitional place, an episode in the transcendent drama of salvation. Spirit and the world, man and nature, were irremediably separated. This dualism prevailed in the West until the continuing development of the material and spiritual conditions of medieval society provoked the emergence of tensions and conflicts that led to the elaboration of two different approaches to the problem: one, that originated among the theologians, based on the disenchantment of the world pursued to its most extreme consequences; the other, inspired by the intellectuals, based on the exaltation of the culture of antiquity and the rediscovery of nature through observation and experience. Reform and Renaissance.

3. The Millennium

Religious reform rejected the doctrine of salvation by way of the sacraments, and left man alone to face the consequences of his actions and forced him to rationalize his conduct. The world — and therefore civilization — was as a result even more deprecated than was the case under Catholicism. One more step in this direction led to the appearance of sects that turned their backs on the “world” and avoided any relations with non-believers. Attachment to the world was an impediment to the revelation of faith by the Holy Spirit, and therefore to the overcoming of irrational subjectivity (of the primitive state of man). In an attempt to adopt the lifestyle of the primitive Christians, the sects preached the community of goods and followed the Bible literally, rejecting any interpretation. Among the adepts of the Free Spirit, a sectarian movement that, under various names, spread during the 13th century across a large part of Europe, the spiritual emancipation of man was pursued by way of the identification of God and the radical rejection of private property. One of the members of this sect, Johannes de Brünn, preached to his followers:

“Leave, leave, leave your homes, your horses, your possessions, your land, leave it, remember that nothing is yours, you possess everything in common....”

At first, however, the call to return to a lost Golden Age, to a natural egalitarian condition that could be realized in the present, a state that the Church Fathers had interpreted as the prelapsarian paradise, did not find many supporters, but when the message was propagated among the poor peasants and the impoverished people of the cities, as was the case in Flanders, Picardy and England (the revolt of John Ball), the idea became a revolutionary myth of the masses. Dissident preachers like John Wycliffe championed it and spread it throughout Europe, triggering revolutions in Bohemia, Germany, Holland, etc. (the Hussite revolt, the peasant wars, the *Bundschuh*, the Anabaptist movement). With the feudal world in full disarray, alongside the Protestant reformers an apocalyptic plebeian party announced the immanent arrival of the Holy Spirit and the return of 1,000 years of primal paradise, a classless and totally free society, in which authority would be abolished; the society lost since the Fall of Man, that is, since the advent of civilization. While the Protestant reformers prepared the world for capitalism, the plebeian party attacked “Babylon” (the commercial cities) and burned books. Although only a few radical factions actually practiced the community of goods — the Adamites, the extremist Taborites, certain groups of Anabaptists, etc. — all of them proclaimed the imminence of a kingdom of equality, where all will enjoy all the goods of nature, of river and forest, of fish and game, in common, and where all

will receive what they need and where there will be no distinctions of status or estate and everyone will be like brothers and sisters; a kingdom that will be inaugurated at the end of a battle of extermination against the Anti-Christ and his hosts, that is, against the State, the Church and the ruling classes. As the agitator Thomas Müntzer proclaimed:

“On! On! On! Let not your sword grow cold, let it not be blunted. Smite, cling, clang, on the anvil of Nimrod, and cast the tower to the ground...”

Calling for the most complete social destruction. Nimrod was the builder of the Tower of Babel and was considered to be the first creator of cities, the inventor of private property and of class distinctions, that is, the destroyer of the primitive State of Nature.

The analysis made by Engels (*The Peasant War in Germany*) of these revolutions is erroneous. He judges that they were only capable of formulating a communist program in a “fantastic” form that could not be realized given the limited productive forces of that time. Not only does he succumb to the mistake of blaming them for not knowing things they could not have known, but he also judges them on the basis of ideas that had not even been conceived yet. Thus, by scorning the real content of the revolts he condemned himself to misunderstanding them, and under the appearance of “historical materialism” he simply asserted the debatable view that communism only became possible with the total development of the proletariat, or, which amounts to the same thing, with the full unfolding of the bourgeois conditions of production. It is true that, far from being primitive and chimerical elaborations of a nineteenth-century emancipatory project, those uprisings pursued the abolition of the feudal world via the extremist realization of the Christian ideal. The millenarianism of the peasant and urban plebs was precisely what they wanted it to be. It was not a movement against history because it remained on the terrain of the myth of the earthly paradise and was alien to the Protestant bourgeoisie. Its goals—the destruction of the Church and of the power of the princes, and the realization of the Millennium—were perfectly possible under those historical conditions, and they did not require any other language for their expression.

4. The Diggers

During the decline of the Middle Ages a sentiment began to be expressed in literature that reflected a yearning for the simple pastoral life and the dream of natural happiness, which represented, that is, the bucolic ideal, which revealed a vital desire for pleasure. The Ancient World was not so distant. In the particular conditions of the Italian cities, one of which was the existence of an educated class,

a culture linked to antiquity flourished that awakened an interest in, and a desire to understand, nature. This attitude restored to nature the reality that Christianity had taken from it. The world was no longer represented as a rigid sphere with God — or the Earth — at the center, and was revealed to be infinite. Religion ceased to be the instrument that made the world intelligible and yielded this role to the testimony of the senses and experience. Religion no longer served as a veil for existence and nature became the field of action for human experience. But it must be recalled that this change of perspective, which was generalized at the end of the 16th century, affected only the educated class of the cities, that is, the core population of the bourgeoisie. The uneducated classes that comprised the majority of the population were unaffected by this intellectual ferment and expressed their ideas in religious terms. As late as the time of the English Revolution we can still contemplate the attempt to use the Gospels to overthrow society. Gerrard Winstanley, the leading personality among the *Diggers*, a faction of the Levelers, replaced the word “God” with “Reason”, because “... *I have been held under darknesse by that word, as I see many people are*”. This Reason is a revealed Reason; a voice told him the news: “*work together and eat bread together, doth advance the law of Reason and Righteousnesse,*” but it also told him that hell does not exist and that heaven is within men. He referred, like all the rest of his predecessors, to a primal Golden Age.

“In the beginning of Time, the great Creator Reason, made the Earth to be a Common Treasury, to preserve Beasts, Birds, Fishes, and Man, the lord that was to govern this Creation; for Man had Domination given to him, over the Beasts, Birds, and Fishes...”

The egoism of some men, however, created authority and servitude, and led them to appropriate the natural wealth that was the common property of all, especially the land, inventing arbitrary laws to justify their usurpation. The “Diggers” based freedom on the free enjoyment of the land and proclaimed that they must

“lay the Foundation of making the Earth a Common Treasury for All, both Rich and Poor, That every one that is born in the land, may be fed by the Earth his Mother that brought him forth, according to the Reason that rules in the Creation.”

They advocated an economy without money, organized around public storehouses where everyone would bring the products of their labor and from which everyone could take what they need. In practice, they broke down fences and occupied common lands and the lands of the nobility in order to cultivate them, carrying on the tradition of previous peasant rebellions by acknowledging the slogan of an unpartitioned land, without property lines or fences. They also refused to pay the tithe, they did not respect the rules regarding Sundays and

they demanded the rule of natural justice and Reason without the mediation of judges and priests. Borrowing the words of Debord that were less justifiably applied to the peasant wars, we can say that the struggle of the Diggers was a

“revolutionary class struggle speaking the language of religion for the last time, which is already a modern revolutionary tendency that as yet lacks the consciousness that it is only historical.”

This shortcoming was the result of the separation between the educated and the uneducated classes, between spiritual and material necessity, since the popular classes, primarily the peasants (the English “yeomanry”), were trapped between the bourgeoisie and the aristocracy. It would be a constant feature of history that obliged the representatives of the bourgeoisie to clothe themselves in the vestments of the apocalypse. Even in the middle of the 19th century Georg Büchner wrote to his friends in the Young Germany group:

“Reform society by ideas? Impossible! Our epoch is altogether materialistic; if you were to act in a strictly political manner, you would soon reach the point where reform comes to an end on its own [...] And the majority class itself? For it, there are only two levers, material poverty and religious fanaticism. Every party that knows how to manipulate these two levers will be victorious. Our time needs steel and bread — and only later a cross or something else...”

5. The Noble Savage

In 1493 Columbus sent a letter to the Secretary of the Catholic Kings, Luis de Santángel, summarizing the results of his voyage to “the Indies”:

“Hispaniola is a marvel. Its hills and mountains, fine plains and open country, are rich and fertile for planting and for pasturage, and for building towns and villages. The seaports there are incredibly fine, as also the magnificent rivers, most of which bear gold. The trees, fruits and grasses differ widely from those in Juana [...] The people of this island and all the others I have found or been informed of go about totally naked, men and women, naked as the day they were born, although some women cover one place with a leaf or a piece of cotton cloth they make for that purpose. They have no iron, nor steel, nor weapons, nor are they fit for them, because although they are well-made men of commanding stature, they appear extraordinarily timid [...] It is true that since they have gained more confidence and are losing this fear, they are so unsuspicious and so generous with what they possess, that no one who had not seen it would believe it. They never refuse anything that is asked for. They even offer it themselves, and show so much love that they would give their very hearts. Whether it be anything of great or small value, with any trifle of whatever kind, they are satisfied.”

The accounts of the Spanish and French explorers provide ample material for the reconstruction of the figure of the noble savage, an image of freedom that had

been fragmented by the shattering of the unity of the Church, the State and earthly life. When Montaigne wanted to study “the human condition”, a very unusual topic for that era, he read the travelers’ accounts published in *Francia Antarctica*:

“what we now see in those nations, does not only surpass all the pictures with which the poets have adorned the golden age, and all their inventions in feigning a happy state of man, but, moreover, the fancy and even the wish and desire of philosophy itself; so native and so pure a simplicity, as we by experience see to be in them, could never enter into their imagination, nor could they ever believe that human society could have been maintained with so little artifice and human patchwork. I should tell Plato, that it is a nation wherein there is no manner of traffic, no knowledge of letters, no science of numbers, no name of magistrate or political superiority; no use of service, riches or poverty, no contracts, no successions, no dividends, no properties, no employments, but those of leisure, no respect of kindred, but common, no clothing, no agriculture, no metal, no use of corn or wine; the very words that signify lying, treachery, dissimulation, avarice, envy, detraction, pardon, never heard of. How much would he find his imaginary republic short of this perfection?” (Essays).

Montaigne thought it fitting to call them barbarians if they were judged by reason, but not if the standard of judgment would be a comparison with the civilized, who exceed them in barbarism. He did not even hesitate to claim that their language, of such an agreeable sound, recalled the accents of the ancient Greeks. He concluded by referring to the response that one of the indigenous people, who had been brought to France, gave to King Charles the Ninth. Asked about how people lived in his country, he shockingly raised the issue of the leveling of conditions:

“They had observed, that there were among us men full and crammed with all manner of commodities, while, in the meantime, their halves were begging at their doors, lean and half-starved with hunger and poverty; and they thought it strange that these necessitous halves were able to suffer so great an inequality and injustice, and that they did not take the others by the throats, or set fire to their houses.”

The myth of the noble savage would be put to use as a political weapon of reason. In *The Adventures of Telemachus*, Fenelon would revisit the theme of “natural man” and would point to the latter’s antagonism with civilized man:

“We look on the manners of these people as a beautiful fable, and they must needs look upon ours as a monstrous dream.”

In describing the delights of “Betica” he was actually talking about certain idealized Canadian aborigines. Its inhabitants live in tents, all together, without any possessive attitude towards the land, where there are gold and silver mines, although:

“The inhabitants, plain and happy in their plainness, do not even deign to reckon gold and silver among their riches; they esteem nothing but what really subserves the wants of man.”

Furthermore:

“As they had no foreign trade, they had no occasion for money. They are almost all shepherds or husbandmen. There are in this country few artificers, for they tolerate no arts but those which subserve the real necessities of man....”.

Superfluous goods are for wicked men, slaves of the false needs upon which they mistakenly believe their happiness depends:

“They have no need of judges, for every man submits to the jurisdiction of conscience. They possess all things in common; for the cattle produce milk, and the fields and the orchards fruit and grain of every kind in such abundance that a people so frugal and temperate have no need of property.”



And, thanks to the fact that they flee from vain wealth and deceitful pleasures, they can remain united, free and equal, peaceful, monogamous and proud of their way of life:

“The Beticans would forsake their country, or choose to die, rather than submit to servitude. It is therefore as difficult to subdue them, as they are incapable of desiring to subdue others.”

The content of this work follows a clear purpose: Fenelon contrasted the corrupt society of Louis XIV with a natural communism, showing, on the one hand, the incompatibility between the bourgeois world and absolutism, and, on the other hand, the political weakness of the incipient French bourgeoisie.

The expansion of the horizons of the world and of the possibilities inherent in it posed the problem of how man would live; the discovery of the American tribes contributed to the construction of a theory of the natural origin of society and the State that could be used to refute the contrary theory of divine origin. While in France this theory revolved around utopian constructs, in England, the country where royal power had been battered by a revolution, bourgeois formulations were much more carefully tailored. In 1609, Garcilaso de la Vega ordered that his *Royal Commentaries* be printed, in which he described the birth and development of the Inca state of Peru. He maintained that the Inca provided the proof of the existence of an almost perfect State that ruled, “*in accordance with the teachings of reason and natural law*”, every minute of every day of the lives of its subjects. The Incan Empire had arisen from the primitive state of nature, free and egalitarian, thanks to the cities of a mythical founder, Manco Capac. The work was translated into French and English, and was influential among the enemies of absolute monarchy, especially John Locke. Thus, from the ranks of the *Whig* party, the bourgeois party that disputed power with the English monarchy and the aristocrats after the revolution, Locke defined the state of nature as

“a state also of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal, no one having more than another; there being nothing more evident than that creatures of the same species and rank, promiscuously born to all the same advantages of nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection...” (*Of Civil Government: The Second Treatise*).

According to Locke, this state was altered by the transgression of natural law that was brought about by the greed to possess more than what was necessary and the unwillingness of some people to work, which obliged the inhabitants to construct a contract-based society. The people, seeking protection, renounced part of their individual freedom and submitted to a superior power created by general agreement. The rationalist philosopher called “natural” what was in fact

only “historical”. Natural law was nothing but the idealist formulation of the bourgeois social norm.

6. Natural Law

If the “geometrical” consideration of nature characteristic of rationalist philosophy (such as that of Descartes or Spinoza) deduced enormous potentials for man within the confines of nature, expressed in the idea of the perfectibility and progress of civilization, for other authors (such as Pascal), the disenchantment of the world by science and reason revealed an infinite cosmic void, foreign to the human being, provoking an existential disorder in man, who was now lost in a little corner of the universe. This latter perspective led to the renunciation of the world and to religion. As the contradictory side of civilization began to be revealed, doubts arose regarding the guarantees of freedom and happiness that the progress of science and the arts was supposed to bring in its wake. The great debate of the century of the Enlightenment was that of nature or civilization, progress “of the arts” or moral progress. For some, one could be happy in ignorance; culture caused inequality and was the source of error, unhappiness and poverty. For others, exactly the opposite was true. Modern thought, however, was irremediably separated from the idea of God and gravitated towards life, for which contemplative retirement could not be the solution. According to Abbe Raynal the study of the lives of primitive peoples must have the purpose of making “*the ignorance of the savage shed light in some way on the civilized peoples.*” In the discussions of the savage, therefore, three positions can be delineated.

One followed the path of utopia. In 1753 Morelly’s *Wreck of the Floating Isles, or Basiliad of the Celebrated Pilpai* was published, which was an apology for natural anarchy and a veritable manual of primitivism. On a blessed isle there lived an innocent and free people who knew how to reject the temptations of laziness and wickedness and attended to nature’s harmonious message, which rather than hindering, actually enhance passions and desires. On this isle there was neither property, nor marriage, nor religion nor privilege. Luxury and the accumulation of wealth were forbidden. Society, formed without an explicit contract, was composed of small communities that practiced agriculture and the arts and engaged in mutual aid, obeying no other law than nature. As for culture, they only needed one book that covered everything.

Another position, which is indebted to Hobbes, paints the life of the savage in the most somber of colors. According to this view, the primitive man, far from being happy, suffers from hunger and countless afflictions that make him a

ferocious and cruel being, and that drive him to a perpetual state of war against all other men. To escape such a risk-filled condition he had to enter into an agreement not to harm the others and to help them when they needed help. Holbach maintained that the savages, because they were deprived of reason, cannot be free, and that freedom in the hands of beings without either culture or virtue was like a knife in the hands of a child:

“The Savage Life or the state of nature towards which some sad thinkers have wanted to drag mankind, the golden age that was so highly praised by the poets, is actually only a state of poverty, of imbecility, and of irrationality. Inviting us to participate in such a life means that we are being told that we should return to our infancy, that we should forget everything we know, that we should renounce the enlightenment that our minds have been able to acquire: meanwhile, unfortunately for us, our reason is still quite underdeveloped, even in the most civilized nations.” (*Système Social*)

Freedom therefore depends on a society ruled by law that is inspired by nature, whose goal must be human happiness. Abbe Marly, halfway between Holbach and Morelly, suggested the happy medium was “perfect equality” obtained by means of the community of goods, since property engendered avarice and ambition, passions that the legislator had to combat (*On Legislation or the Principle of Law*). Marly advocated Spartan equality, the enemy of science and the arts, since the latter had separated man from the state of nature, and Athenian freedom, based on the total transfer of authority to the social body.

A third position, that of Rousseau, who followed in the footsteps of Locke, simultaneously rehabilitated the egalitarian primitive community and also consecrated the State with the popular will and the “contract”. This is the content of the *Discourse on Inequality*. For Rousseau inequality did not exist in the state of nature, it only made its appearance when man emerged from that state, when he formed society:

“The moment one man needed the help of another; as soon as it was found to be useful for one to have provisions for two, equality disappeared, property appeared, work became necessary, and the fast forests changed into smiling Fields that had to be watered with the sweat of men, and where slavery and misery were soon seen to sprout and grow together with harvests.”

This period corresponds with the introduction of agriculture and metallurgy. From the cultivation of the land one arrived at the division of the land and from there at property. The arts brought with them an endless series of needs that seized upon man. Then, as a corollary, came exploitation and wars, laws and institutions. As a result, civilized man has lived under the constraints of superfluous desires and artificial passions. But:

“When savage man has eaten, he is at peace with all nature and the friend of all those like him [...] since savage man desires only things which he knows and knows only things which he is capable of possessing or which are easy to acquire, nothing should be as tranquil as his soul and nothing as limited as his mind.”

With regard to the balance sheet of advantages and disadvantages, the civilized world was in the red, because we never found a savage who wanted to become civilized but there were many cases of civilized people who went to live among the savages. The novel explanation for this fact was that happiness had nothing to do with reason but with feeling. Finally, by considering freedom as a gift of nature and property as a social convention, Rousseau provided a decisive argument for egalitarianism, and exercised more influence than any other author on the French Revolution, Romanticism and Socialism.

The publication of Bougainville's *Voyage Round the World* in 1771 gave rise to discussions concerning the state of nature and the image of the savage. Once again, the depiction of a natural and happy world was transformed into the mirror where civilized society could identify its malaise and its misfortune. Tahiti, with its voluptuous nature and the sexual freedom of its inhabitants, became the focal point of the moral preoccupations of the era. The savage continued to be the cause of the nostalgic dream of a virtuous and happy life in harmony with nature. Diderot would express this better than anyone else in his “Supplement to the Voyage of Bougainville”:

“How far we are from nature and happiness! The empire of nature cannot be destroyed. However much you handicap it with obstacles it will endure [...] How short the code of nations would be if it conformed rigidly to the law of nature. How many errors and vices man would be spared!”

Civilized taboos will never be able to eradicate man's natural inclinations, at most they can dissimulate them, to his misfortune:

“Would you like an abridged account of almost all our wretchedness? Here it is. There existed a natural man. There was introduced into this man an artificial man: and a civil war, enduring the whole of life, arose in the cavern. Sometimes the natural man is the stronger, sometimes he is struck down by the moral and artificial man. In either case the poor monster is pulled about, pinched with tweezers, tortured, stretched on the wheel.”

Diderot resolves the dilemma of whether one should civilize man or abandon him to his instincts in the following manner: “*If you aspire to be a tyrant, civilize him.... Do you wish him to be happy and free? Then do not meddle in his affairs.*” For Diderot the history of political, civil and religious institutions was nothing but the history of tyranny over the human species. In the final analysis, if you have to choose between civilization and nature, “*Really I cannot say. But this I*

know. Townsmen have several times been seen to strip themselves and return to the forest. The woodsman has never put on clothes and come to the town.” The enlightened man did not renounce civilization, nor did he seriously consider the advisability of putting an end to progress. The opposition between nature and reason was insuperable using only the instruments of reason, but the philosophy of the 18th century was absolutely unaware of this. What Marx called “*eighteenth century Robinsonades*” were in reality an anticipation of the bourgeois society that had been in gestation since the 16th century. In this society based on contract, each individual was dispossessed of all natural bonds, bonds that in the medieval era had made him an integral and indivisible part of society. The savage was the idealization of the isolated individual that was a product of the dissolution of the feudal world. The idea of the savage was an outcome of history rather than the starting point of history.

7. Equality

During the French Revolution, the specifically bourgeois current as well as the “*sans culottes*” constantly invoked nature and its designs, swearing by Rousseau or Marly. The agitator Anacharsis Cloots, a self-proclaimed “*citizen of humanity*”, claimed to have discovered his political system, “*The Republic of the Human Race*”, by consulting nature. Taking an example at random, the oration of the Abbe Fauchet before the *The Friends of Truth*, we read:

“Man was originally a product of nature in the fullness of his existence and in society; he was established in the midst of its realm in order to enjoy the good things of life, to take from it what he needs to survive, to sweeten and to embellish his existence, and to accumulate by means of his personal efforts the goods supplied by nature [...] He got enjoyment out of his existence; he took possession of his domain; he identified the gifts that were destined for his use; he increased his pleasure by the exercise of the faculties that enabled him to make constant improvements: labor was not a punishment for him; it was an agreeable elaboration of his power and his genius. He was happy as a result of the serenity of reason and the sweet society which doubled his happiness by the help of his neighbor; he was happy due to the generosity of the earth and the simple efforts that multiplied his pleasures; such was the state of man in the golden age of nature.... Man was born free; this beautiful faculty was given to him so that he could rise to the challenge of his destiny and in order to second the intentions of nature, which was so favorable for him....”

By living in society man separated himself from nature and turned his back on its principles, and suffered tyranny and injustice. Man can never return to the golden age but something of that age can be reproduced if society were to be

ordered in such a way that “*all have something, and each does not have too much*”, in brief, if it can be ordered in accordance with the ways of nature:

“It is upon natural law that legal institutions must be based for the first time. The model is neither ancient Greece nor ancient Italy; it is immutable nature: the social order must adapt to nature, or else the human race will be eternally miserable [...] Opinion rises to the level of nature: men want to be happy and just; and they will be because their will is totally united in favor of happiness and justice. No power can resist them when nature is on their side, when they march freely under its commands...”

According to Marat, man in nature, in order to defend himself from the oppression and injustice inflicted on him by others, has the right to rebel, rob, subjugate and kill if necessary. The unrestricted exercise of this right would have led to a permanent state of war and in order to escape this fate man renounced some of the advantages of nature in favor of the advantages of living in society: “*he renounced his natural rights in order to enjoy his civil rights*”; in short, he signed a social contract.

“Thus, the rights of nature acquired, by means of the social contract, a sacred character. Because men all received the same rights from nature, they must have equal rights in the social condition.”

But the contract may be broken if there are privileged persons who enjoy themselves at the expense of the poor:

“justice and wisdom demand that at least part of these goods should be destined, by way of a judicious allocation, to be shared out among the citizens who have nothing; for the honest citizen abandoned to poverty and to hopelessness by society, returns to the state of nature and therefore has the right to demand with weapons in hand not only the benefits that he had not renounced but to obtain other greater benefits as well.” (“The Constitution”)

This was a unique expression of the right to insurrection, which Marat called, in accordance with the political jargon of the era, “*the return to nature*”. The French revolutionaries were becoming more and more aware of the danger posed by the inequality of fortunes, or, which amounts to the same thing, class differences. The most radical among them suggested compulsory equalization, a leveling of property that pointed towards the idea of common property, but their proposals were at first limited to subordinating property rights to the interests of society, thus undermining its basis. For the deputy from La Meuse, Harmand, “*equality of rights was a gift of nature and not a favor granted by society*”. For the Republican Antonelle:

“Nature did not produce property owners, just as it did not produce the nobility; it only produced beings with nothing, equal in their needs as in their rights.”

The struggle for equality was the crowning moment of the Revolution and its most enduring demand, but the appeal to communism took place on the occasion when the bourgeoisie separated itself from the plebeians and persecuted them ruthlessly. For the conspirator Babeuf, too, property was not a natural right; to the contrary:

“The condition of community is the only just condition, the only good condition, the only condition that is in conformance with the pure sentiments of nature and outside of that condition peaceful and truly happy societies cannot exist”.

In order for the dispossessed to believe that communism is more than just a dream they will have to recognize that “*the fruits of labor are for all and the land is owned by no one*”.

Primitivist communism was the last upwelling of the French Revolution and the first form that expressed the future emancipatory ideology of the proletariat, the last class produced by history.

8. Terra Incognita

The rational understanding of the world created the foundations for a new freedom at the same time that it unleashed the forces that would hinder its realization. The domain of nature, far from achieving freedom for man, subjugated him more completely than religious despotism. Science and reason were no better than revelation and the divine will. The advent of industrial civilization, offspring of applied science and technical progress, with its long train of destructive consequences, entailed the worst slavery: wage labor. The instrumental fruits of Reason gave birth to a monstrous civilization in which both man and nature were devastated. The opposition between the city and the countryside grew more pronounced than ever. The people of the countryside saw how the new laws passed by the bourgeoisie deprived the majority of them of their means of subsistence, and they were expelled and concentrated in the most pestilential quarters of the cities. The cities grew in size and became more and more ugly at the cost of an enslaved mass of human labor power and prisoners of misfortune. The individual experienced, in the form of boredom and neurosis, the disparity between his abstract freedom and the social repression of his impulses. The confrontation between the ever-narrowing world and the hypertrophied individual took the form of a unique ideological product: Romanticism. The Romantics set feeling and passion, or nature, against reason and progress, or society. Chateaubriand formulated the individual drama:

“Let us listen to the voice of our conscience. What does it tell us about Nature? ‘It is free.’ And about Society? ‘It rules’.”

They directed their curiosity towards the past, towards the adolescence of man, to unknown epochs. For Victor Hugo primitive man was not separated from the divine and that is why his way of thinking was composed of dreams and his language was poetry:

“Before the epoch which modern society has dubbed ‘ancient,’ there was another epoch which the ancients called ‘fabulous,’ but which it would be more accurate to call ‘primitive’... In primitive times, when man awakes in a world that is newly created, poetry awakes with him. In the face of the marvellous things that dazzle and intoxicate him, his first speech is a hymn simply. He is still so close to God that all his meditations are ecstatic, all his dreams are visions. His bosom swells, he sings as he breathes. His lyre has but three strings — God, the soul, creation; but this threefold mystery envelopes everything, this threefold idea embraces everything. The earth is still almost deserted. There are families, but no nations; patriarchs, but no kings. Each race exists at its own pleasure; no property, no laws, no contentions, no wars. Everything belongs to each and to all. Society is a community. Man is restrained in nought. He leads that nomadic pastoral life with which all civilizations begin, and which is so well adapted to solitary contemplation, to fanciful reverie. He follows every suggestion, he goes hither and thither, at random. His thought, like his life, resembles a cloud that changes its shape and its direction according to the wind that drives it. Such is the first man, such is the first poet. He is young, he is cynical. Prayer is his sole religion, the ode is his only form of poetry. This ode, this poem of primitive times, is Genesis.” (Preface to *Cromwell*)

This spirit gave rise to an unusual interest in traditions, legends and popular songs, but also in virgin, mysterious nature, situated on the edge of the world, in “*terra incognita*”:

“The memory of a distant country overflowing with an abundance of all the gifts of nature, the image of a wild and lush vegetation, reanimated and fortified the spirit; oppressed in the present, we take delight in getting away from our condition in order to enjoy that simple grandeur that characterized the infancy of the human race.” (Alexander Von Humboldt, *The Legend of El Dorado*)

Exotic countries, especially “the Orient”, became the focus of interest (“*Spain was still the Orient*”). A feverish passion developed for virgin islands (*Robinson Crusoe* and *Paul and Virginia* were set on islands). Imagination was set above reason, emotion above logic and intuition above experience. The lost connections with nature — and with divinity — could not be reconstituted with the help of reason. Freedom was the most valuable good of man that society could not guarantee; it was sought outside of society, on its margins, among the fugitives, the bandits, rebel peoples and savages. Society was irremediably corrupt. An Indian Chief said:

“I began to grasp that this hateful mixture of ranks and fortunes, of extraordinary opulence and excessive poverty, of crime without punishment and sacrificed

innocence, forms what in Europe is called society. That is not how it is with us: among the longhouses of the Iroquois there are no great or small men, no rich or poor, but hearts at peace and freedom of man everywhere.”

Nature not only appeared as the dream of freedom, rooted in a natural community held together by feeling, but also as the goal towards which society itself had to aim:

“Can it be otherwise than that the highest degree of civilization connects with nature?” (Chateaubriand, *The Natchez*)

The absolute liberty that was proclaimed and the society that existed could not be more irreconcilable; Shelley said that if men were created by Jupiter, they could also destroy him. The solution appeared to lie in revolution, but the Romantics were more tourists than revolutionaries. In any case, the solution did not lie in civilization; returning to Chateaubriand:

“Civilisation has reached its highest point, but a materialistic barren civilisation, which can produce nothing, since one can only create life through morality; one can only forge nations by Heavenly means: railroads only carry us more swiftly towards the abyss.”

The present was no longer seen as a beginning but as an end; the Romantic generation had become pessimistic and simply looked back to the past. The multiple faces of disillusionment transformed the Romantic ideology into an idealization of the past and a defense of archaic forms of authority, reflecting the new form of post-revolutionary rule, the fruit of the alliance between the bourgeoisie and the backward classes that were in decline. In this spiritual atmosphere naturalist theories suffered a profound setback at the hands of German idealism. By seeking to situate man within historical becoming, that is, at the end of a long series of civilizations, Hegel definitively ruined enlightenment political thought and its Romantic heirs. Later, the Hegelians Marx and Bakunin would proclaim to the four winds that freedom and equality were social rather than natural facts, and that the proletariat, oppressed humanity, must seek them among the debris of bourgeois civilization and not in untamed nature.

9. Freedom

This change of perspective that Hegel’s works meant for the 19th century was total and was completely absorbed by socialist thought, forcing the latter to break not only with the Christian metaphysic and bourgeois positivism but also with the Rousseauian ideology of the Revolution. It is often forgotten that Bakunin came of age in the Hegelian left and that the origins of anarchism are incomprehensible without taking this into account. Bakunin considered

Rousseau to be the worst of all the bourgeois ideologists on the basis of the assumption that a social contract legitimized the State, a brutal and primitive form of social organization. It was assumed that before the advent of the State man was free but Bakunin thought otherwise about natural freedom:

“It is nothing but the absolute dependence of the ape-man under the permanent pressure of the external world.”

The freedom of primitive man depended on his solitude:

“The freedom of one of them does not require the freedom of any other; to the contrary, every one of these individual liberties is based on itself alone, it exists on its own, and therefore the freedom of each necessarily appears as the negation of the freedom of all the others, and all of them, should they meet, must limit and restrict each other mutually, they must contradict each other and destroy each other...”

Up to this point Bakunin is repeating what Holbach said; but now he parts company with him completely:

“Man does not really become man, he does not conquer the possibility of his internal emancipation unless he manages to break the chains of the slavery that external nature imposes upon all living beings.”

Humanity was born the slave of nature and its freedom begins when humanity is emancipated from nature, that is, when it becomes civilized. From that point on a series of historical circumstances determine man:

“Man does not create society; he is born within it. He is not born free, but enslaved, the product of a particular social environment created by a long series of past influences, of historical developments and events [...] It could be said that the collective consciousness of any society, embodied in both the great public institutions as well as in all the details of its private life upon which all its theories are based, forms a kind of environment, a kind of intellectual and moral atmosphere, one that is harmful but absolutely necessary for the existence of all its members.”

Freedom and individuality itself were not natural facts but historical products created by human society: “*Society, far from reducing and limiting, to the contrary creates the freedom of human individuals*”; and further, “*the freedom of individuals is not an individual but a collective fact, a collective product*”, which argument he uses to refute the individualist workers, whom he defined as “false brothers”. Marx said the same thing:

“Man is, in the most literal sense, a zoon politikon, not just a social animal, but an animal that can only become an individual within society.” (Grundrisse)

The cosmopolitan Bakunin imagined man living outside of all society, in a desert, and concluded:

“If he does not miserably perish, which is the most probable result, he will become nothing but a boor, an ape, lacking speech and thought.”

He even criticized the communitarian spirit of pre-bourgeois societies which he called “natural patriotism”, even though the solidarity of trades and communities was decisive in the first stages of the workers movement:

“The less civilization prevails in human communities, the less complicated and the more simple is the very basis of social life and the more intensely is natural patriotism expressed. Whence we may deduce that natural patriotism is inversely related to civilization, that is, to the triumph of humanity...”

However, it was

“the barbarians who represent, today, the faith in the human destiny and the future of civilization, while the civilized can no longer achieve their salvation except in barbarism.”

Even so, in socialism the victory over primitivism was not total. In his *Origins of the Family*, Engels started from the basis of the primitive community:

“At all earlier stages of society production was essentially collective, just as consumption proceeded by direct distribution of the products within larger or smaller communistic communities.”

At the beginning, then, was the state of nature, the golden age that was perverted according to Engels by the division of labor, which successively gave rise to livestock raising, agriculture, metalworking and trade. Then came private property, the accumulation of wealth, and finally, the formation of classes in conflict, and then the State was born in order to maintain a balance in the class struggle. This was a reading of Rousseau and Hobbes in a socialist key, accompanied by a quantity of data from historical and ethnographic research. Kropotkin, for his part, would try to prove solidarity as a social principle by looking in nature, which contains abundant examples of animal solidarity (*Mutual Aid*). He would introduce an authentic theoretical breakthrough by reducing anarchism to a mere Darwinist sociology and by making the methodology of the natural sciences the guiding procedure of social analysis. After Kropotkin, the roots of Bakunin’s thought would fall into oblivion and it was normal to read Rousseauian discussions in anarchist publications. Working class socialism, meanwhile, had become reconciled to bourgeois society as a necessary but inevitable evil and, as a result of this positive evaluation of the historical role of the bourgeoisie, it was only a short step to the rehabilitation of the idea of progress and the embrace of science and economic development. The proletariat, by renouncing its own past, by forgetting that its movement had made its debut with a bloody struggle against industrialization that did not hesitate to destroy machines, factories and commodities, and by ignoring the fact that its own interests demanded the destruction of the labor market rather than its control, took this step. The bourgeoisie, on the other hand, became more and more

stratified, and became more reactionary as a result of its position in the hierarchical class order, and restricted its actions to defending its privileges and forgetting about the general interest. As the bourgeoisie abandoned all the reformist whims that previously, when it was revolutionary, had formed its own patrimony, the proletariat, socialist as well as anarchist, made those same demands its own. Anarchism, for example, constructed an entire field of culture out of them: the idea of progress, individualism, education for all, opposition to war, defense of nature, family planning, birth control and the other themes of women's liberation, sexual freedom, health and nutrition, the dissemination of scientific knowledge, etc. But despite the fact that the emancipatory project of the workers had been enriched with new concrete contents that were previously the property of the bourgeoisie, it nonetheless experienced a setback. Social democracy became a reformist movement. Revolutionary Marxism and anarchosyndicalism were the two attempts to overcome this setback.

10. Nowhere

The worker of one hundred years ago could be defined by his dependence on machinery. The machine had split the artisan into technology and worker. The goal pursued was the rationalization of labor and the principal consequence, the ejection of the worker from the process of production. This process having reached its limit with automation, we obtain a producer expelled from production (with a totally depreciated wage) and a consumer who is absolutely dependent on machines. The collective use of machinery changed nothing with regard to the worker's condition, and thus changed nothing with regard to the nature of his exploitation, but only changed the leadership of the process, which was now in the hands of experts or managers. As a result, the proletariat that was thus split in two could not overcome itself, that is, free itself, by way of the development of the machine or its communist use, but by way of its disappearance. It is true that in some socialist currents there were complaints about a "working class" civilization conceived as a copy of the bourgeois civilization, but they were few and only influenced a minority. It is significant that, as if acknowledging the unlikelihood of the realization of their proposals, they presented their theories in the form of utopian narratives. For example, in *The American Anarchist City* [1914] by the anarchist Pierre Quiroule [alias Alexandre Falconnet], we read:

"It is true that everything that exists, the product of labor, must belong to the workers. But the latter are deceiving themselves if they want to 'continue' rather than 'innovate'; for we must not imagine any concept of a new society made in the mold of the current one; if we did, it would not be worth the effort to move one little

finger to help bring it about. Everything that exists must be replaced by something more rational and in conformance with real human needs. And Super denied that coal mines, and the dreadnoughts of the sea, and the fiery dragons of the rails, and the herculean automatons of the steelworks, are factors that contribute to human well-being, happiness and freedom; he denied that the electric trolleys that fill our streets represent progress; that the tunnels and underground railways are necessary; or that the great electrical generation plants that give us power and light represent a benefit for mankind..."

All of these creations born of a sick civilization are condemned to disappear with the victory of the real revolution because:

"To continue exploiting the mines, to keep the trains and electric trolleys running, to keep the lights on as we did in capitalist society, to keep the factories and workshops in operation, to take advantage, in short, of everything that currently exists, all these sources of profit, regardless of what is done to perfect the machines and the means of production, for the purpose of alleviating and relieving the burden of labor, and to act on behalf of the condition of the producers charged with their management, will always amount to accepting the existence of an army of slaves eternally chained to the same amount of demoralizing and unrewarding labor..."

Therefore, the idea of the expropriation of the bourgeoisie, as such, implies consequences that are opposed to the libertarian goal. The legacy of a social organization that was complicated, regimented and centralized by technology was a poisoned legacy.

For his part, the socialist William Morris conceived of the free society as the result of a process of reversing the ruin and depopulation of the rural villages brought about by capitalism:

"People flocked into the country villages, and, so to say, flung themselves upon the freed land like a wild beast upon his prey; and in a very little time the villages of England were more populous than they had been since the fourteenth century, and were still growing fast [...] People found out what they were fit for, and gave up attempting to push themselves into occupations in which they must needs fail. The town invaded the country; but the invaders, like the warlike invaders of early days, yielded to the influence of their surroundings, and became country people; and in their turn, as they became more numerous than the townsmen, influenced them also..." (*News from Nowhere*)

In both cases a kind of return to pre-capitalist conditions is advocated, but this return is to be accompanied by the experience gained by fighting against capitalism. A conscious return that does not reject the knowledge acquired in the past and rather than establishing limits to technology, it oriented its use to the achievement of a free society of equal producers.

11. The Country of Naturia

In fin de siècle Paris a certain Henri Zisly lived, an anarchist railroad worker, a contributor to various magazines such as *Temps Nouveaux*, an editor of *L'Etat Naturel* and the author of a *Voyage to the Beautiful Country of Naturia* [*Voyage au beau pays de Naturie*, 1900]. He was the first person to champion the cause of a nature that was enslaved by industrial progress. For the anarchists generally, nature was made for all free and equal men and the transgression of its laws was the source of all social evils. Bakunin's coffin had been sealed with seven seals. In nature harmony reigned, that is, it lacked contradictions. Anarchy was its norm. The social revolution meant the abolition of the divorce between man and nature and the return to the natural life, via the natural association of producers. The peculiarity of Zisly resided in his disagreement with the standard view when it came to the means to be employed. For most anarchists, firm believers in progress, the separation between man and nature would be overcome thanks to science and reason. For them, the natural organization of society was the same thing as the scientific organization of society. Humanity was advancing towards freedom arm in arm with science and the antagonism between civilization and nature would be abolished. Zisly, however, did not believe in the beneficent powers of science or in those of industrial civilization; "*our science is the science of life, the science of nature*". With great foresight he blamed technological progress for the disappearance of the forests, the disasters of pollution, climate change, and the illnesses and degenerative conditions affecting plants, animals and humans. "*Civilization is evil and Nature is good*", he concluded, and that is why he fought "*against the monster of civilization and for the advent of Integral Nature*". He recognized that the emancipation of the working class was a prerequisite for a return to the natural state. For the emancipation of the working class involved the reconstruction of the natural state of the earth that had been corrupted by civilization and a return to a primitive state of humanity. How could this be achieved? By obeying the laws of nature. Avoiding trade and industry. Abolishing private property and anti-natural needs. Happiness would come from the satisfaction of basic needs like food, drink, clothing, shelter, labor, love... In his list of the things we can do without, we find artificial lighting, stoves, bicycles, the gramophone, wine, blouses, and windows and sheet metal. In the "*normal life*" amidst the full enjoyment of "*freedom in Integral Nature*" the whole world goes on foot and lives in cabins or at the most in houses made of stone, without dancing, theater, auto races or bullfights.

Zisly was the first advocate of the naturist current in the libertarian milieu, and far from devoting our attention to the silliness of his claims or the simplicity of his alternatives, we shall interpret his role as that of a defender of nature in harmony with man, a precondition of his emancipation. Zisly and his friends had a better understanding than anyone else of that time of the fact that the destruction of the natural environment was the consequence of the technological colonization (or artificialization) of society, or to put it another way, of the domestication of man by machines. The exploitation of nature was the other side of the coin of the exploitation of man. The bourgeoisie identified progress with economic development. This progress meant that nature was exclusively the stage for the unfolding of the productive forces and the backdrop for wage slavery. The degradation of nature proceeded in tandem with the degradation of the worker. Anarcho-naturism, an eminently pedagogical tendency, contributed to the program of social redemption the demand for a balance between nature and humanity without which equality and freedom would be impossible. While nature had to be humanized, man had to be naturalized. The influence of anarcho-naturism is demonstrated by the policy statement on libertarian communism of the 1936 Zaragoza Congress of the CNT:

“Those communes which reject industrialization, the naturists and nudists, for instance, may agree upon a different model of coexistence and will be entitled to an autonomous administration released from the general commitments. Since such naturist/nudist communes (or communes of some other sort) will be unable to satisfy their own needs, however limited these needs may be, their delegates to congresses of the Iberian Confederation of Autonomous Libertarian Communes will be empowered to enter into economic contacts with other agricultural and industrial communes.”

12. Potlatch

The disenchantment of the primitive by ethnography, anthropology and archaeology must shed light on the crossroads before which the civilized world stands, rather than confuse it with nebulous ideologies. Contemporary primitive societies employ little time in labor that is necessary for survival; thus, they are not the false primitives who are forced to engage in a constant search for food, for they never work more than is necessary to meet their needs, that is, they are anti-work societies. They are not subsistence societies; they are capable of accumulating a surplus of food above and beyond their needs, but they only do so in order to consume it or waste it, rather than use it for trade. The kind of relations that govern their societies are not based on exchange or barter because scarcity is unknown, but on the “gift”. They are therefore societies without markets. This detail might be useful for those who desire to recover the

advantages of primitive life for the free and civilized society. The indigenous peoples of the northwest coast of North America engaged in contests of sumptuary gift-giving in order to humble, challenge or compel their rivals, which they called “potlatch”. This was an explosion of totally unproductive wastefulness, whose goals were prestige and glory. It was on the basis of this practice that Georges Bataille offered his suggestion about how to overcome the conflict between civilization and savagery. From this perspective the excesses of technology can be rectified. What technology builds, man destroys. Technology acquires a new role, that of extending the possibilities of dilapidation. Civilization cannot survive unless it destroys itself in one gigantic potlatch. The social revolution was the highest form of potlatch. Civilization’s only historical justification was its revolutionary overthrow, when its surpluses would have to be liberated for destruction. This scorn for wealth and rejection of the fruits of labor was the real luxury, the luxury of the poor and the refutation of the work ethic preached by domination. The permanent revolution received a surprising theoretical confirmation. Ultimately, this competitive destruction was not just a natural form of leveling, but was also the finally discovered procedure that would permit the reconciliation of man and the world. It might be objected that the dynamic of destruction and construction is precisely what characterizes capitalist civilization, but there is one important difference: the active subject is different in this case. And the meaning of the process is logically different, and indeed the opposite.

The primitivist critique of civilization must be of interest to those who believe that the human ends — freedom and happiness — can only be achieved with the dismantling the apparatus of production, de-urbanization and life in community. We cannot, however, overlook the danger that an erroneous formulation of the problem entails, with the elevation of nature to a supreme principle (for example, nature equals anarchy), for this would transform nature into a weapon to be used against thought and against freedom. The abdication of the human spirit in favor of nature, or the reduction of man to pure nature, would imply a degradation of thought into irrational forms. To proclaim the superiority of primitive man by situating paradise in the Paleolithic era and original sin in the appearance of symbolic language, as John Zerzan does in his *Future Primitive*, does not help clarify the problem either, since the roots of human unhappiness are not to be found in language nor can human unhappiness be cured by means of a return to archaic times. The hunter-gatherer of the primitivists is nothing but an idealized reflection of the atomized and déclassé individual of mass society produced by late capitalism.

Nature is not the repository of the truth, only of the wild side. And civilization is not simply the locus of the lie; it is also the locus of history. Both have been subjugated by the independent power of the economy, which is why they are both intertwined and form part of each other. Dispossessed, separated from his works, submerged in alienation, man is just as alienated from nature as from civilization, but the latter is his battlefield. By making civilization his own, he will also make nature his own. As a result, it is not a matter of man escaping from civilization, but of creating a situation where civilization cannot escape from man's control. Nature will recover its proper status only when man is free, and he will be free only when he controls his labor, that is, when the powers he has created which have become independent of him — the State, the economy, etc. — are destroyed. And then the knowledge that primitive societies were societies without economies and without States, because they did not allow the formation of any kind of separate power, since they could not even conceive of the existence of desires for wealth, power or domination within them, might prove useful.

Miguel Amorós, March 2003.

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“Primitivismo e historia”

The Two Anarchisms

Legalism and Illegalism in the Libertarian Movement in Late 19th Century Spain

Two false views have dominated libertarian historiography to this day. The first considers Spanish anarchism between 1868 and 1910 to be a kind of pre-history of the CNT. Manuel Buenacasa invented this notion in 1927 and Juan Gómez Casas gave it its finishing touches in 1968. According to this view, the triune CNT-FAI-FIJI was the culmination of a movement that had followed a linear course of development since Fanelli's mission to Spain. The second view posits the allegedly unique character of the Spanish case and its particular genealogy; this view was the product of the administrative imagination of the Urales family and of Santillán. For these dignitaries, Iberian anarchism is an almost racial phenomenon, more the offspring of Pi y Margall than of Bakunin; it would thus seem to have originated with Anselmo Lorenzo, Farga Pellicer and Serrano Oteiza, was then taken up by Lluas and Tárrida, and culminated with Mella and the editors of *La Revista Blanca*. All of them were old republicans and representatives of legalist, doctrinaire and liberal tendencies who were practically always in the minority and were frequently repudiated by the revolutionary workers. Thus, the anarchism of action is left out or almost entirely ignored: the anarchism of González Morago, Salvochea and Vallina, an anarchism that was based on illegalist and conspiratorial affinity groups and which was dominant in the libertarian milieu and exercised an enduring influence on the workers movement. Concerning this kind of anarchism, little is said; concerning the other kind of anarchism, the peaceful and bureaucratic anarchism of the congresses, epic tales are spun. We can begin to unravel this contradiction by way of solid historical research that will put everyone in their proper place, but its main cause was never the absence of critical investigation but rather the inertia of a movement that had never drawn up a balance sheet of anything. Few periods of its long history have been addressed with rigor, passion and objectivity; most studies of this topic have been cooked up in the kitchens of the universities. It must be rescued from such a fate.

The most surprising fact about nineteenth century anarchism is its transformation from a tactic of mass insurrection into an ideology separate from and external to the working class, which took place between 1877 and 1889,

between the Congress of Verviers and the International Anarchist Congress in Paris. If there is anything special about the Spanish case it is the fact that, due to Spanish anarchism's closer links with working class organizations, this transformation took two or three years longer than elsewhere to reach its culmination. This development reflected the problems that had arisen with regard to praxis in a context of the decline of the workers movement, mainly problems of organization, action and the formation of revolutionary consciousness. The unsatisfactory solutions proffered for these problems caused the social influence of anarchism to diminish and its revolutionary capacity to dwindle. As a result, trade union and political reformism gained ground and exacerbated the parlous situation of the anarchist movement, which had in the meantime split along the lines of two narrowly circumscribed and irreconcilable positions. On the one side were the supporters of organization at any price, which was to be sustained exclusively by oral and written propaganda; on the other side, the unconditional advocates of violent agitation, who identified organization with authority and put all their faith in the exemplary nature of propaganda of the deed. For the former, once the majority of the population was convinced and organized, the revolution would automatically take place in peace and glory; for the latter, acts of violence carried out by small groups or even by individuals would suffice to unleash spontaneous uprisings that would usher in the revolution amidst catastrophe. The two positions, once petrified, mutually reinforced one another, since each one was a reaction against the other, and they degenerated after 1890 into a state of scholastic sclerosis, on the one hand, and an amoral and aggressive individualism, on the other. The appalling repression inflicted on the anarchists by the State achieved what the most lucid anarchists were unable to accomplish, that is, it put an end to such sectarian madness, but exacted a very high price: the sacrifice of a generation of fighters. The theoretical and practical dead end in which anarchism found itself could not be escaped with mental leaps forward which, by ignoring action — from the everyday struggle to so-called “expropriation” — indulged in speculation about the future society and expressed the view that anarchy would be the product of an ineluctable evolution that depends more on scientific progress than on the will of individuals (all of Kropotkin's and Mella's works express this tendency). Nor did mindless activism help free anarchism from the pedagogical and contemplative pacifism in which it had become mired; and the last outburst of individualism, expressed in the fashionable popularity of Nietzsche and Stirner and the intellectualist and elitist rejection of the class struggle, was even less capable of providing an impetus that could help anarchism break free from its stagnation. Anarchism really only reappeared on the stage of history when it

entered the trade unions and began to advocate sabotage and the general strike, thus bringing its worst period of confusion to a close.

Working class anarchism was born in the IWA as an anti-authoritarian current that proclaimed the immediate possibility of social revolution by way of the destruction of the State and classes, in accordance with the example set by the Paris Commune. It soon clashed with the authoritarian currents of the IWA, from which it split, and remained united as a separate current until 1878. After 1878, due to persecution, the failure of various insurrections, and the decline of the workers movement, anarchism was reduced to a minority faction and was isolated from the proletarian milieu, while the “workers” parties, often led by exiles, underwent a period of rapid growth. The revolutionary awakening of the masses did not take place and the anarchists subjected their tactics to reexamination. Workers struggles for partial improvements — “the economic struggle” — were looked down upon, because they were considered to be manifestations of egoism that diverted the class from its revolutionary mission. Yet the anarchists nonetheless cherished a blind faith in the revolutionary spontaneity of the working class masses, which was assumed to be an easy matter to provoke with a few exemplary acts. Any other kind of propaganda was held to be ineffective. The organization—previously the cornerstone of internationalism—came to be considered to be a hindrance to freedom that, furthermore, led to moderation and the cultivation of a leader-follower mentality. Small affinity groups were supposed to be sufficient for action; any attempt to organize beyond such groups fell under the suspicion of authoritarianism. The London Congress (1881) confirmed this radical change of perspective. There was a general uproar in favor of freedom whenever anyone spoke of organization, as if the two things were incompatible. Even the very fact of holding Congresses, electing delegates and deliberating resolutions appeared to be an obstacle standing in the way of the free initiative of individuals and a restriction on the free impulse of the masses. There was a suspicious insistence on the manufacture of explosives — it was later confirmed that agents of the French police were behind these proposals — and “revolutionary morality” was subjected to ridicule. The conclusion: tactics based on mass organization and education by way of propaganda and “economic disturbance” were discouraged in favor of the simpler method of propaganda of the deed and insurrection.

Here on the Peninsula, things took a different turn. When Fanelli arrived, he found a working class that had reached such a degree of maturity that it had separated from the bourgeois radicalism represented by the republicans in order to elaborate its own goals and ideology. This task was carried out by the

Federación Regional Española de la Internacional [the Spanish Regional Federation of the International]. The FRE sought to organize the workers by way of “resistance” and “cooperation” for the social revolution, and the adequate weapon was the “scientific strike”, but the latter demanded an organizational level and a clockwork execution that were truly unrealistic. At that time the idea of organization was preeminent; it was the cornerstone of the internationalist tactic, the embodiment of class solidarity and the womb of the future society. One could say that when the organization was perfected, the revolution would begin. The revolution does not have to be bloody: the internationalists said, “Peace to men, war on institutions”. Nonetheless, the outlawing of the FRE because of the events of 1873 compelled a radical change of tactics. On the one hand, the insurrections of Sanlúcar, Alcoy and Cartagena had exhausted the organization, and had also strengthened the position of the legalist tendency of some members of the resistance societies. On the other hand, the old landowning class and the industrial and commercial middle classes had formed a united front in defense of private property and religion. The proletariat had to confront the united bourgeoisie, which was ready for Europeanization at least with respect to the strengthening of the repressive apparatus of the State. The Madrid Congress (1874) did not advocate “resistance” or the strike, and declared its support for insurrection and “reprisals”: “The situation is such that political action can no longer take any other form than conspiracy and violent revolution.” The FRE went underground, declaring that it would not recognize bourgeois legality — “The International is above the law” — and it became a “secret” organization; its sections and associations dissolved into “revolutionary action groups” and it adopted a Bakuninist program. Because it did not have sufficient forces, the Federal Commission of the FRE sought to take advantage of those of the republicans, and attempted to persuade the latter to join an uprising, to no avail. The contrast between the revolutionary will of the internationalists and the cold and passive condition of the masses was insurmountable, thus facilitating the emergence of a reformist fraction among the internationalists’ ranks. In 1881, the FRE was exhausted and those who advocated a return to legality, an opportunity which had arisen because of economic prosperity and the new liberal government, won the support of the majority of the organization. As a result, the Federal Commission was deposed and the FRE itself dissolved and replaced by another organization, the Federación de Trabajadores de la Región Española [the Federation of Workers of the Spanish Region].

The tactics of the FTRE may be defined as complete legalism and bureaucracy: Taking advantage of all legal means, rejection of action outside the law, consideration of action as the exercise of a right and of reforms as a step

forward. It condemned violence — “Progress, not violence, is the teacher” — and any disturbance of order: strikes, for example, were supposed to be subject to such complicated rules as to render them practically impossible. A gradual improvement of economic conditions was sought by way of the “practice of legality”, cooperatives and contracts with tenant farmers, not discounting alliances with other parties “to defend liberty”, and not disdaining associating with “all educated persons” of bourgeois origin. It was therefore not at all unexpected that the new organization should have refrained from disseminating the declarations, which were so contrary to its own project, of the London Congress. The “destructive policy” of the FTRE, inspired by “Progress” with a capital “P”, was “as variable as the circumstances would permit and as the needs require”, and actually constituted an attempt to restore the political conditions of the First Republic, that is, the most favorable kind of bourgeois legality, upon the basis of which the FTRE would be able to win an escalating series of reforms. Calling for the modification of the economic conditions of the proletariat by way of legislation, and refusing to support any revolutionary movement or even victims of repression, it professed that it did not aspire to put an end to bourgeois rule, but to play the role of social democracy. The contradiction between its policies and the anarchism proclaimed in its statutes was merely an apparent contradiction, since that anarchism was merely a formality. Separated from the nourishing pragmatism of workers struggles, it was an “ideal”, contrived far from the class, taught by intellectual members of the organization. It was not, as in the times of the International, the result of the everyday experiences of the workers, the crystallization of their social experience, but the product of the speculation of a handful of ideologues. The legalists were the first to separate theory and practice, relegating anarchism to the status of a “philosophy”.

Both the reformism of the FTRE as well as the decline in the revolutionary spirit and activity of the working class favored the development of a bourgeois anarchism, an anarchism that claimed to be above classes. Bakuninist ideas were abandoned, thus breaking down precisely the bridges to philosophy, history and dialectics. The Bakuninist critique of bourgeois culture and of the fetishism of science was ignored with Olympian confidence, and bourgeois thinkers such as Büchner, Comte and Rousseau were consulted in order to concoct a positivist ideology that could be passed off as anarchism. This kind of anarchism did not perceive any specific movement or historical initiative that could be attributed to the proletariat, and sought in scientism, anthropological optimism and nature itself, the social laws that would create the material conditions for emancipation. In order to study the social question, it was necessary to imitate

the way entomologists study butterflies, that is, it must be treated as a biological fact. Ruling out the historical determination of society — and of the individuals who live in society — and ignoring the relation between the production of means of life and forms of social organization, the new libertarian ideology conceived of social facts as the results of natural laws that could be interpreted by science. These laws were timeless; in order to achieve anarchy it was merely necessary to discover these laws and for society to allow itself to be guided by them. Anarchy was nothing but nature governing itself by its own laws, which may be reduced to a single law: the law of progress. Progress and freedom were therefore synonymous. Independently of the will of individuals, progress implied continuous social development until the attainment, by virtue of a law of nature, of anarchy. The eminently bourgeois belief in progress was so strong that, for an ideologue like Mella, the revolution was simply the concluding stage of evolution, a process that takes place in society and in history, morality and art, as well as in nature. Revolution and evolution were convergent realities. In short, this was a vulgar anarchism that idealized the economic and social development of the bourgeoisie and which fit the reformism propagated by the FTRE like a glove. The distance between the real bourgeoisie and its ideal version was so great that it permitted any sort of philanthropic liberalism to pass itself off as real anarchism.

Isolated from the workers movement in many countries, anarchism ceased to be the most radical expression of the historic movement that dissolves the existing conditions. With the path of action practically blocked, it was hardly capable of developing on the theoretical level, if we except the formulation of libertarian communism and the Kropotkinist studies of a naturalist bent. There were major contradictions between theory and practice, as was demonstrated by the paltry results garnered by the proclamation of propaganda of the deed and insurrection; in fact, the anarchists were divided with respect to every issue. A failed attempt to establish unity at the Geneva Congress (1882) caused one of the participants to exclaim: “we are united in our division.” A similar attempt at the Barcelona Congress (the “Cosmopolitan” Congress of 1885) was even more of a fiasco, “due to the intemperance of some of the delegates, who with their protests constantly interrupted the debate”.

The predominant sentiment — especially in France — was an anti-organizational state of mind that Malatesta dubbed “amorphous”. A true Bakuninist, Malatesta was one of the few anarchists of his time who was convinced that the success of the revolution hinged upon the existence of internationally organized forces. Most anarchists had reservations about the legitimacy of a congress for establishing a line of conduct, and were even less

enthusiastic about it if it were to promote some kind of reorganization, at a time when even the least attempt at coordination was considered to be coercive. For many of them, the congresses were pointless and had no reason to exist, but for others they were necessary in order to prevent the isolation and marginalization of the movement, and there were even those who wanted to attract people from the socialist congresses. It was only when Clement Duval and Vittorio Pini proclaimed the right to theft at their respective trials, however, that the process of ideological decomposition in anarchism reached its high point. The International Congress in Paris (July 1889) was a sounding board for this decomposition. Anarchism hit rock bottom: the social question was transformed into an existential question. The individual replaced the class as the revolutionary subject. The world and the individual were no longer understood in tandem, as related to one another; the social conflict was not interpreted as a class struggle but as a struggle between the lone individual and bourgeois society. The masses were of no account because they were not revolutionary. The movement had proceeded, without any transitional stages, directly from spontaneist optimism to defeatist pessimism. If we read *The Thief*, for example — the novel by Georges Darien — we see the masses described as cowards, imbeciles and servile lackeys, eager to toil to enrich the exploiter, to offer their services to the ambitious, and to bow down before the powerful. The enemy was no longer institutions, but men; all the bourgeoisie, even the most insignificant, and all the slaves, all of whom were worthless. No respect was due to Humanity because there were no more men. It was no longer necessary to observe any norms of conduct. Whoever could violate the most such norms was more revolutionary than anyone else. Arising from an inverted morality, the illegalist mentality perceived all morality as just so many prejudices and as a sign of weakness. The figure of the outlaw, the man who seized by force what bourgeois society had denied him, as in the romantic epoch, was the object of admiration. Even a simple act motivated by self-preservation such as theft was elevated to the category of revolutionary deeds. In vain did Kropotkin plead that theft or “individual expropriation” did not abolish, but rather reinforced, private property. Because the amoralists blamed everything on society and because they restricted themselves to making their own individual revolutions, they did not acknowledge any contradiction between ends and means. The means they used were, moreover, consistent with the ends they sought.

The particular characteristics of the Spanish case would make the illegalist psychosis commence with a reaction against the legalism of the FTRE and a radical questioning of its organizational conception. The FTRE had hardly been established before the first dissident faction arose, that of “The Disinherited”,

which called for a return to the tactics of the FRE, that is, a decentralized, secret organization, insurrectionary revolutionary action and calls for reprisals. The police responded with the affair of “La Mano Negra” [The Black Hand], which led to the imprisonment of hundreds of Andalusian workers. When the Sagasta government took advantage of the opportunity to outlaw the FTRE, the FTRE’s Federal Commission condemned the crimes allegedly committed by the phantom organization of La Mano Negra without expressing even the slightest doubt concerning the police account of the affair, thus handing over its Andalusian militants to the torturers and hired thugs. Then the local federation of Gracia held a secret congress (1884) where it was decided that the FTRE should be dissolved and that the organization’s members should go underground (the “Aventine Secession”). The confrontations between the old leaders (“sellouts” and “traitors”) and the “Aventine” dissidents (“Jacobins”, “troublemakers” and “charlatans”) would be repeated at the “Cosmopolitan” Congress in the following year. The Madrid Congress of 1885 was able to prevent the dissolution of the FTRE but only in exchange for the resignation of the Federal Commission and the incorporation of less hierarchical statutes. The new equilibrium between the tendencies proved to be too tenuous, however, and the new orientation of the Catalan sections decided the fate of the entire Federation. All the proposed resolutions were directed against the foundations of the bureaucratic edifice erected in 1881. They called for the dissolution of the Federal Commission, the abolition of congresses and statutes, permission for more than one section of the same trade or local federation to operate in the same town, the elimination of the requirement that prospective members of the Federation should express agreement with its principles, the renunciation of the imperative mandate of the delegates, etc. The Conferences for Social Studies held in Barcelona (in 1887 and 1888) even recommended the rejection of the section structure itself, the cornerstone of the entire working class organizational system (which would later be called the *sindicato* [trade union]), because its creation expressed the desire to obtain immediate improvements in working conditions which, because such improvements were almost impossible, must be concentrated instead on the realization of revolutionary ideals. The sections therefore had to be replaced by groups of workers without regard for trade or occupation. “Resistance” as a product of a perfected organization looked good on paper, but proved to be impractical in reality. “Spontaneous and natural” resistance was preferable, without rules, in the heat of an unpremeditated solidarity that was not affected by considerations of self-interest. The most adequate organizational form for the new perspective could not be the FTRE, but a federation in which individuals, associations and

sections would be completely autonomous, that is, one in which each one of its constituent elements would preserve its specific ideology, its particular goals and its independence of action. Rather than a new federation, this described a kind of ad hoc agreement for joint action without any statutes, or leadership, or reciprocally binding commitments. The new system liberated strikes from all bureaucratic encumbrances but did not envision means to transform them into either weapons of revolution or schools for anarchism. The revolutionary question therefore remained unresolved: those who conceived the Pact of Union and Solidarity sought to address this problem with a kind of anarchist party (the OARE), thus separating the “resistance against capital” from the “struggle for anarchy”. Anarchism removed itself from the social battle because it had its own separate struggle, one that was at a higher level. It thus came to the same conclusions as the reformists: the proletarians were incapable of going beyond “resistance”, unless they adhere to an ideology that is expressed in a fragmented manner by groups external to the class.

The second factor that paved the way to illegalism was the theoretical battle unleashed concerning the distribution of the product of labor in the future society. The clash between collectivism and communism was superimposed on the major disagreements with regard to organization and action, which were the real bones of contention. What was actually at stake were two opposed concepts of anarchism. The formula of “to each according to his needs”, which summarized anarchist communism, appeared in 1876 in Italy and was adopted by the majority of European anarchists a few years later. Repression in France and Italy — especially after the Lyon Trial in 1883 — forced many anarchists to go into exile, some of whom took refuge in Spain and established themselves in Barcelona, where they made contact with the dissident sector of the FTRE and propagated communist ideas. The anarchists of Gracia were the most radical and immediately echoed the new ideas in their paper, *La Justicia Humana*, edited by Emilio Hugas and Martín Borrás, initiating a debate with the supporters of the collectivist formula, “to each the entire product of his labor”, which was the slogan of the old International. The works of Kropotkin, however, were beginning to be translated and had a major impact, and the collectivists retreated to take refuge in the compromise slogan formulated by Tàrrida at the Second Socialist Congress of Reus (1889): anarchism “without adjectives”, or “straight” anarchism, or to express it more accurately, “undefined” anarchism. Malatesta’s pamphlet, *Between Peasants*, which advocated the communist position, was also published in Spanish, and five years later all Spanish anarchists were communists. The differences between communists and collectivists were not limited to hypotheses about the future

society. The Spanish anarcho-communists rejected organization, in agreement with Kropotkin and the French (and in opposition to Malatesta): sections, federations, mandated delegates, voting, minutes, majorities, elected officers, etc. They only accepted the existence of informal groups, without any commitments on the part of their members. They claimed that fraternal contact between comrades, more effectively than any regulation or circular, would suffice to create the relations necessary for propaganda and action. Their point of departure was the idea that, in order to carry out the revolution, neither accords nor rules were needed, nor any kind of strategy, much less any organization; the revolution was an explosion of popular fury that would take place spontaneously, thanks to the fact that certain violent acts will have awakened the smoldering spirit of the oppressed masses. Thus, "instead of repudiating personal acts in which the individual pays with his life for carrying out a heroic action for the cause of justice, we should to the contrary praise them so that they will have emulators, and these acts, becoming generalized, are the acts that can lead the spontaneous revolution" (*Tierra y Libertad*, Gracia, 1899; this was the paper formerly known as *La Justicia Humana*). The way to cause the revolution to break out could not be more simplistic: instead of preparations, which, of course, implied organization, the hypertrophied exemplary nature of impressive personal acts. Violence was cheerfully exalted: "Force is repelled with force. That is why dynamite was invented" (motto of *The Victim of Labor*, 1889). Action and propaganda of the deed were the same thing, as they both implied violence and illegalism: "take advantage of every occasion ... to provoke the people to attack and seize property, to offend authority and to scorn and violate the law..." (in *The Social Revolution*, 1889, edited by Francesco Serantoni; the same newspaper printed a eulogy for Pini). The effectiveness of these methods with respect to awakening the spirit of revolt in the workers had yet to be proven, and indeed the opposite conclusion seemed to have more evidence in its favor. The fireworks had been exploding since 1886 in sympathy with the labor conflicts of the period, without a major increase in working class combativity and without anyone even asking if all the bombs were worth the risk and the trouble they caused. This was the weakest point of the spontaneist tactic: the unrealistic evaluation of the utility of violent actions and the callous disregard of their foreseeable consequences. Without being aware of it, their refusal to draw up a balance sheet of their words and deeds drove the most resolute Spanish anarchists down the slope of ideological chaos and irresponsible adventurism, a slope down which their European counterparts had already plummeted.

The workers movement experienced a brief resurgence with the May Day demonstrations and the struggle for the eight hour day, but was almost immediately suppressed. Then, for the first time, anarchist individualism made its debut in its ultraviolent version in the publications, *El Revolucionario* and *El Porvenir Anarquista* [The Anarchist Future] (Gracia, 1891), in proclamations written by Paolo Schichi, Paul Bernard and Sebastián Suñé. Malatesta, who visited Barcelona around this time, was given a cold reception by the communist sector, especially by Schichi, who had recently published a paper with an unambiguously significant title (*Pensiero e Dinamita* [*Thought and Dynamite*]), and was compelled to complete his Spanish tour with an escort of collectivists. As a result of the bomb attacks at the Plaza Real the group influenced by Schichi and Bernard was imprisoned, but others took up where they left off. Every nuance and variety of illegalist anarchism were propagated in ephemeral publications: amoralism, “to attain our goal, all means are good” (*La Cuestión Social*, 1892, written in Valencia by refugees); unrealistic optimism, “since no one respects it anymore, authority is collapsing” (*La Revancha* [Revenge], 1893, edited in Reus by Bernard); triumphalist individualism, “individual propaganda is and always will be the most vivid kind and will yield the most results” (*La Controversia*, 1893, also written in Gracia by refugees); the cult of violence, “science has placed at our disposal what is necessary to cause the most solid fortresses to fly into the air” (*El Eco de Ravachol*, Sabadell, 1893); organizational phobia, “organization engenders submission” (*La Unión Obrera*, Sant Martí de Provençals, 1891), “organization and revolution are two words that are like cat and dog to each other” (*Ravachol*, Sabadell, 1893), “The organization is the offspring of authority” (*La Controversia*), “[organization] is the school of laziness” (*El Eco del Rebelde*, Zaragoza, 1892), etc. The draconian repression of the riot at Jerez (1892) would be echoed by the sentencing of Ravachol in France, a personality who had been praised so often that he had been turned into a victim of society and a martyr for the idea on both sides of the Pyrenees. The thirst to avenge the cruelty displayed at Jerez found a model in Ravachol’s bombs, when the climate was already ripe for terrorism. For many people, the sadism of bourgeois repression legitimized any act, regardless of how fearful and bloody it might be. Thus, a yearning for vengeance against the bourgeoisie and its executioners found expression in the failed assassination attempt of Pallás against general Martínez Campos and Salvador’s bombs at the Liceo. These were no longer instances of propaganda of the deed; they were desperate acts that sought to “teach a hard lesson” to the ruling class, to show it that its victory was not complete, that from now on it was war to the death. Unfortunately, the anarchists were never aware of the fact that they were

confronted by a reactionary class entrenched in *caciquismo* and religion, a class that would not allow even the most trivial reforms, and that in order to prevent the loss of its privileges and its property it was capable of decimating the working class without batting an eye. To terrorize it without really causing it any serious harm was the worst kind of mistake because the repression that it unleashed in response to these attacks struck far beyond its ostensible targets, and even had an impact on its own more progressive sectors. The State promulgated two laws against anarchism while simultaneously creating the police force — the “political-social brigade” — responsible for enforcing them. Nor was that all, because the State also resorted to the suspension of civil liberties and to provocations. The police, by means of agents infiltrated into the libertarian milieu, arranged an attack in which only innocent people would die: the bomb thrown at the procession of the Corpus Christi in Barcelona as it passed down the street of Cambios Nuevos (1896). Suddenly it was open season on all anarchists, regardless of how peaceful they may have been; then, the repression was turned against the militant workers, regardless of whether or not they were anarchists; and finally, the persecution was extended without much of a display of logic to journalists, republicans, intellectuals and even modest bourgeois liberals. This wave of repression concluded in the Montjuich Trials, frame-ups that became symbols of the criminal injustice and boundless cruelty of the bourgeois inquisitors. With regard to illegality, the Spanish bourgeoisie had outdone anarchy. The execution of Cánovas in 1897, who was the mastermind behind the drama of Montjuich, was a paltry moral compensation.

Returning to the “affinity group” concept upon which the agitation of the period between 1890 and 1897 was based, we see that the absence of ideological controls, responsibilities and rules exposed the groups to the machinations of criminals and opportunists who were attracted to the groups by the prospect of the possible rewards of illegal action, and opened up the door to frauds and infiltrators who employed violent language. It was not without reason that the peaceful anarchists accused the illegalist milieu of being full of ignorant bums and fanatics who were working hand in hand with thieves, provocateurs and informers. Their unrealistic idea of revolution might at first have been nothing but a harmless sentimental peccadillo of the revolutionaries in their struggle with the reformists, but once it reached a certain threshold, the idea cannot be understood as anything but a culpable lack of consciousness. The immediate results of this puerile tactic were confusion and disaster. The workers resistance societies were broken up, lives were thrown away for no purpose, and part of the population sided with the government. The numerous groups and newspapers disappeared without a trace, leaving a vacuum that would be filled

by the political parties. Many militants permanently distanced themselves from anarchy and those who remained were too few to work alone, and had to collaborate with republicans and philanthropic bourgeoisie. The campaign for new trials for the victims of Montjuich, Jerez and La Mano Negra succeeded, but the revolution was more distant then ever. Fatally lacking a strategy, anarchism had lost the social war in its first skirmishes. It would recover historically with its entry into the trade unions, but it never regained its old vigor. All too often was the word “freedom” used to sabotage efforts to make it a reality, and all too often were “circumstances” used as an excuse for capitulation: voluntarism without ideas and unprincipled opportunism were always its chronic illnesses.

Miguel Amorós.

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“Los dos anarquismos

Legalismo e ilegalismo libertarios a finales del siglo XIX”

November 2003

Revolution and Primitivism

“Why is it that, in our eyes
Any past time
Seems better?”

We live in hard times, in which the past is incommunicable. The survivors from the older generations are incapable of passing on the experience of their defeats and their victories to young rebels because the latter are living in such different conditions of existence that the old truths no longer apply. The older generation has no descendants, and today's generation has no ancestors. Capitalism and industrial civilization have created an artificial environment where people without memories undergo changes at a dizzying speed. These changes take place so fast that they leave the very notion of change behind; the idea of time is therefore also lost. Every fifteen or twenty years one has to start all over again from scratch. The dead were buried long before the new generation could succumb to the temptation of venerating their memory. The revolution does not take its poetry from the past, but it cannot draw its poetry from the future, either. We are installed in a perpetual present, in which the old defeated projects of emancipation and the preposterous ideologies born from their failure walk the same road.

At the very same moment in history when the industrial city was born, so also was the desire to flee from it. The modern sentimentality concerning nature was born along with air pollution and the accumulation of hazardous wastes. The emotion is legitimate, but by being transformed into nostalgia it was to become one of the faces of progress. As a reaction against the harm wrought by industry it sensitizes people; but this is not enough. What is needed is for sentiment to become consciousness and consciousness to become a practical force. Recourse must be had to reflection and historical analysis, that is, one must turn to theory in order to generalize it as revolt. One has to grow up, leave childhood behind and accept the fact that we are social and rational beings. Industrial civilization must be opposed with rigorous thought and a strong organization that allows that thought to become practice in the struggle against this civilization. There must be revolutionary action, as the social revolution will be ecological or, as they say now, primitivist, or it will not take place at all.

When speaking of primitivism one should distinguish between those who want to understand archaic societies in order to acquire conceptual weapons for confronting and transforming the world, and those who seek innocence and beatitude, lost in the passage of time, in primitive lifestyles. The former do not intend to recreate these social formations, however much they may be inspired by them; the latter assert in all seriousness that the road to freedom for humanity passes through the return to prehistoric stages. Therefore, in this view, the mere abolition of the State, capital and industrial production amounts to nothing unless it results in our return to the forest. In the one case, an attempt is made to develop social critique and to show that other ways of life are possible; in the other, it is a matter of a self-satisfied ideology which masks social conflict and impedes the developing consciousness of the exploited. There are thus two completely different forms of primitivism: a subversive one, which wants to clarify the new problems posed by the social struggle and to drive the revolution forward; and one which is conformist and reactionary, and muddles these problems and sows confusion, a form of primitivism that is based on instinct and rejects method, and that makes itself comfortable in those spaces that industrial society allows it to occupy. The one is proof of health, the other, of spiritual sickness. It is the latter fever of consciousness we shall now address.

An ideology so demented and unreal, one that belongs on the same shelf with other liberal extravagances, should not be of much importance, since its practice does not extend beyond mere day tripping and is about as adventurous as the Marseilles Soap Factory, yet to the degree that it informs an irrationalist discourse that plunges headlong into bourgeoisification or delirium, it is of some significance. It turns nature into a weapon to be used against thought. Vulgar and philistine primitivism demands the abolition of all culture — of all civilization — and of all social organization, especially that of the cities, the cradle of freedom and the site of the most extreme forms of class struggle. Thought and art, literature and the liberal professions, testimonies to human creativity and genius, genuine manifestations of man's freedom, are in its view utterly dispensable. The role of science or the printing press in the struggle against religion and monarchy is deprecated, just like every other historical fact. Vulgar primitivism not only rejects scientific knowledge or liberating inventions, it rejects every other form of knowledge and transmission of knowledge that approaches the historical horizon. There is nothing to learn or to teach from the history of civilizations beyond the recipe for making falafels. In short, the primitivist philistine does not demand freedom, but ignorance, i.e., barbarism.

If we view society through such a lens, all of its historical moments are reduced to one: all civilizations are territories of domestication and the lack of

freedom. This is a radically anti-historical and feverishly individualistic ideology. For this ideology, every form of organization is a source of authority, all mass movements aspire to construct a center of power and all revolutions murder freedom. One must not, in that case, organize, or promote mass actions, or pursue revolutionary goals. Vulgar primitivism is a moralistic ideology which as such does not get involved in action, and cannot endure a confrontation with reality. It is immobilist. Under the optics of such a renunciation of the social struggle, the revolution is just another error; the vulgar primitivist opposes insurrection to the social revolution, but not a popular insurrection, an extension of the revolution, but rather a strictly moral and individual rebellion. For the vulgar primitivist, freedom is not something that is realized in society, via institutions. So there is no social question, only a personal question. There is no battlefield to join, but a cloak in which one can hide. The society of radical primitivism must not be contaminated, a wall of primitivist absurdities must be raised and one must take refuge behind it.

The reactionary character of vulgar primitivism is revealed by its position on the workers movement. With one stroke it liquidates the role of the proletariat in history, of revolution and of anarchism itself, which, let us not forget, is an idea of freedom and emancipation born in the furnace of class struggle. In its view, the history of the class struggle is merely the history of the struggle for power. The proletariat only aspires to the seizure of power, like the bourgeoisie; there are no differences between the various tendencies in the workers movement since they all want the same thing. Vulgar primitivism consequently disdains the workers struggle against exploitation and for freedom. For the vulgar primitivist this struggle generates new forms of authority, and class goals and methods are therefore rejected. Direct action, the general strike and assemblies are condemned along with the unitary trade unions and the workers councils. The old emancipatory goal, the free association of the producers — the idea that the emancipation of the workers must be achieved by the workers themselves — is an authoritarian and domesticating fallacy from this perspective. The vulgar primitivist is against work — as is the whole world — and is, furthermore, against the worker; the fact that billions of workers live in this world who cannot make their living from pleasurable activities like hunting and fishing, does not seem to impel him to reveal his plans for a return to the primitive lifestyle. He does not bother to explain the real possibilities of his ramblings because, as we have pointed out above, he does not immerse himself in the river of action. He limits himself to advocating, as a distant goal, an anomic social state which could give rise to ephemeral associations based upon temporary agreements. Once again,

barbarism, but this time bourgeois barbarism. The primitivized ideal of a second home with a garden and some neighbors.

The vulgar primitivist does not want to destroy the social order, or to force a radical change in society, or to abruptly dissolve the existing living conditions, since that would definitely constitute the revolution. To revolutionary social practice, he opposes an apparent and fictitious existential project, purged of all social criteria. He eliminates everything that is socially concrete from practice, everything historical and social. His homilies on freedom leave him committed to nothing, but confer upon him a rebellious aura which gives him comfort and reassurance. All of them feel like Papuans, although they are 20,000 kilometers from New Guinea. Their paeans to absolute freedom are exclusively directed against the practices which make it possible. Once again we recognize the transgressive but simultaneously immobilist attitude of the decadent bourgeoisie, typical of those times when the ruling class must subvert its own values in order to preserve them.

The dehumanization of society has led to the idealization of nature. Just like the Enlightenment bourgeoisie of the 18th century and the romantic writers after them, the vulgar primitivists provide nature with contents, they spiritualize it and convert it into the home of freedom and harmony. They project representations of the private life of the middle classes, the heirs of the bourgeois ideal, into nature. They seek this cozy heaven through the ideologization of the wilderness. They preach personal salvation at the expense of civilization — of society — rather than in the struggle against oppression. They renounce the social experience of freedom, because for them civilization, all of society, is a form of life that is alien to the natural order. The opposition of nature and society presupposes the complete ruin of the civilized world; thus, for the vulgar primitivist, one must rebuild nature rather than make the revolution; not even the primitivist revolution. He does not want to leave adolescence and take a leap forward in history; he wants, as a matter of speculation, of course, to return to the ice age. Everyone knows: in the darkness of time all cats were grey.

The vulgar primitivist flees from history as well as from action. He does not consider the past and the present as guides for living. The cult of nature or the idealization of archaic communities obeys the desire to avoid the dangers of history (the dangers of action) because, above all, the vulgar primitivist does not take risks. Deep down, he knows that he is committed to nothing because a return to nature is not possible; there is no longer a virgin nature to which one can return. A nature which is prior to history does not exist, not even for

primitive peoples; it all revolves around the economy. As Bernard Charbonneau said, “nature is the public garden of the totality”. Nature has already been urbanized and suburbanized. Strategic thought and social action are necessary for the liberation of nature as well as for the liberation of individuals; in short, revolutions are necessary which will lead us to a civilization free of the commodity and industry. The revolution is the only way to impart consciousness to history and history is the specifically human model of existence, the environment where individuals can be accommodated and acknowledged, to become themselves. So, how does one make history? As someone said, at first gradually, then all at once.

Miguel Amorós.

Transcript of the author’s contribution to a debate with David Watson and *Los Amigos de Ludd* that took place at the *Espai Obert* in Barcelona, November 25, 2003.

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Original text:

“Revolución y primitivismo”

José Pellicer

The word that best describes José Pellicer is revolutionary, a description that is related with a status of prestige that is hard to understand today, since today popular prestige is linked to image more than to example and the value of a man is determined by his ratings in the spectacle rather than his courage or his integrity. If we allow the facts to speak for themselves, José Pellicer was not just another radical personality but a great revolutionary, someone who wanted to radically extirpate injustice and exploitation and who devoted all his intelligence and all his efforts to this goal, reaching very great heights in the process. The course of his life in the service of the proletarian revolution is more than enough proof of this. His advocacy of the revolutionary cause was all the more deeply held and real insofar as it was not based on economic motivations, as he grew up in a family that had a comfortable standard of living. He became an anarchist out of idealism; his dedication was always altruistic, putting his life in the balance and looking for the dignity of the weak and the oppressed in the struggle against the powerful and the exploiters. Pellicer attained the dimensions of a historical figure because the virtues of all those who accompanied him in the struggle were concentrated within him, and he represented the ideal combination of the emancipatory thought of the oppressed class and the effective struggle for its liberation. A CNT militant since 1932, he participated in all the insurrectional struggles of his time, earning persecution and prison sentences. We should call attention especially to the role he played in the insurrectional strike in Manresa, in October 1934, his activities as a militant in the FAI, his participation in the defense committees of the CNT and above all his intervention in the famous Iron Column, whose very name caused so many supporters of the oppressive order to tremble when they heard it. With barely a thousand men armed more with enthusiasm than with the inadequate equipment they obtained in the assault on the Alameda barracks in Valencia, they fought in Sarrión and Puerto Escandón, forcing the fascists to retreat to the gates of Teruel. A large region was liberated from the fascists and this helped take the pressure off Castellón and Sagunto. He was outstanding not only for his courage, but for his gifts as an organizer and strategist of the libertarian revolution, which were comparable to those of Durruti, Máximo Franco or Francisco Maroto. He was highly educated, multilingual, theoretically proficient, with very clear ideas which he was capable of expressing incisively, which, together with his tall stature and his steady voice, impressed everyone who

met him. Those who knew him and shared his ideas and goals recognized in him an uncommon human dimension and charisma. He needed these qualities in order to lead a column composed of people who did not recognize any authority and had no leaders to give a revolutionary meaning to their initiative. The Iron Column collaborated with the peasants of the villages in which it was stationed, showing them the way to live in freedom. The first experiences of libertarian communism took place in the heat of the battles fought by the militias. More than any other unit, even more than the Durruti Column, the Iron Column acted as a militia and as a revolutionary organization at the same time: it published the minutes of its assemblies, printed a newspaper ("The Line of Fire"), and distributed manifestos and issued communiqués, because it had to explain its actions in the rearguard and justify its activities and decisions to the workers and the peasants. Such an organization preached by example and gave proof of it. This was its principal characteristic that Burnett Bolloten recalled in his book *The Grand Camouflage*.



José Pellicer Gandía (1912–1942)

Historians have dealt very badly with him for the simple reason that they never considered the civil war to be a failed revolution, the last of the revolutions based on emancipatory ideals, and they instead presented it as a military and clerical revolt against a legitimately constituted democratic government. Proceeding in this manner, historians took the side of the Republic and deliberately concealed the fierce class confrontation that lay beneath the cloak of republican politics. The independent and revolutionary action of an entire historical class, the proletariat, was ignored, and along with it, its greatest social achievements and its most outstanding figures. Even the pain and suffering of the victims was passed over. The mass graves were only excavated

almost thirty years after Franco's death. The political interests of the future post-Francoist leaders required social amnesia and their historians handed it to them on a platter. Spanish democracy was built on forgetting.

But this is even more serious: our contemporary libertarians have not paid very much attention to their heroes, either, beyond a deplorable sanctification of Durruti. Insisting on making a myth out of Durruti, they ended up killing the revolutionary Durruti. This is just as understandable as the first time he was killed. The weight of the past is too heavy for today's libertarians, who are confused and depressed in the face of their historical responsibilities. This is why they feel so comfortable in the company of pathetic renegades like García Oliver, heroic moderates like Juan Peiró, or hollow figureheads like Federica Montseny. Furthermore, we must not forget to mention the fact that many *cenetistas* were hardly revolutionary and that their activities, in the light of history, led to discouragement and bewilderment. If we also consider the fact that important Valencian *cenetistas* like Juan López and the supporters of the Manifesto of the Five Points collaborated during the sixties with Francoism, it should not surprise us that José Pellicer would be indigestible for so many of his coreligionists.

Everyone knows that the libertarian movement was profoundly divided over questions of principles, tactics and goals, and the Zaragoza Congress did not resolve the problem. When the fascist revolt began on July 18, a clear dividing line rapidly emerged among the anarchosyndicalists between two antagonistic orientations for action, one that was possibilist and prepared to make compromises, and the other that was idealist and revolutionary. Pellicer was to be found among the latter, and given his disposition it could not have been otherwise. In Valencia the two positions, represented by the Strike Committee (syndicalist) and the Defense Committee (FAI), respectively, became evident from the very first day of the civil war. After the storming of the barracks both tendencies found the road wide open to them; the former reestablished republican legality via the Popular Executive Committee, an independent entity that politically incorporated itself in the new reality represented by the eruption of the CNT and the UGT. The latter, on the one hand, created rank and file committees that took over factories and towns, and on the other hand organized the militia columns that stopped the advance of the military in Teruel, Andalusia and Madrid. José Pellicer represents the revolutionary initiative of the Valencian workers and peasants; Juan López, his counterpart among the moderate faction, represented the political cunning of the nascent libertarian bureaucracy, which sought to get a foothold in a share of the power that had been conquered, especially in the economic domain. The accommodationist tendency of the CNT, which enjoyed majority support among the militants, would tolerate the

bourgeois forms of legality and authority in order to participate in them, while the revolutionary tendency would be trapped at the front, short of weapons and other military supplies, only to discover a rearguard where everything went on like before, without the least trace of revolutionary spirit. The notorious expeditions of the Iron Column to the rearguard in search of weapons in the armories of the Civil Guard or the new communist police force known as the Popular Guard, or in search of money in jewelry shops and the homes of the rich, not to speak of the burning of government records or the assaults on the courts, made the collaborationist leaders of the CNT look bad to their political partners. These leaders turned their backs on the revolutionaries who were left to face the reconstructed and rearmed republican legal system alone. The result was the massacre of December 30 at the Plaza de Tetuán where Pellicer was wounded, foreshadowing the May events in Barcelona. The revolutionaries were caught in the grips of the moral blackmail of their own organization: if they abandoned the front to return to Valencia and start a civil war in the Republican camp they would hand victory to the fascists. They could only postpone their revenge until better times. But by surrendering on this point they surrendered on all of them; in the dissolution of the Committees, in the entry into the Government of four anarchist ministers, in the disarming of the peasant collectives and the militarization of the militia columns. Once again, blackmail: either adjust or disappear. The militarization order was agreed to with ninety-two members of the Iron Column imprisoned in the Torres de Quart for the events at Vinalosa. It would, however, be unjust to say that José Pellicer submitted to circumstances as Mera suggests in his memoirs, for example. Within the FAI itself, Pellicer, as a member of the group known as “Nosotros”, advocated an organic conduct more in accordance with the ideas of liberation and only accepted transitory alliances with the other self-proclaimed sectors of the anti-fascist front for imperative military reasons. With funds provided by the Column, his comrades founded the daily newspaper, *Nosotros*, providing the Valencian anarchist groups with the best anti-authoritarian newspaper published on the peninsula. *Nosotros* did not conform to the official directives as long as it was controlled by Pellicer’s group, and it was the mouthpiece for the best anarchist revolutionary spirit until the FAI was transformed into a political party and the Peninsular Committee selected it to be its organ, seizing it after cunning machinations in the plenums.

The good times of the revolution would never return. Pellicer was wounded in Albarracín and separated from the 83rd Brigade, the former Iron Column, an event that was taken advantage of by the communists, who were much more powerful in Negrín’s Government, in order to arrest him through the use of SIM agents and he was sent from one secret prison to another. They did not

dare to assassinate him as they did Andrés Nin and he was finally released and reintegrated into the Popular Army at the front with the 129th Brigade. During the last days of the war he was in Alicante, entirely preoccupied, as always, with saving others, even at the cost of his own safety. Arrested by the Italians, he was denounced and savagely beaten by the victors. Torture was not enough and since they could not destroy his manhood and his integrity with violence and humiliation they tried to do so with the most treacherous methods: they attempted to corrupt him in exchange for sparing his life. His executioners did not know that someone like Pellicer did not sell himself, that there was nothing in the world that could buy his honor. Pellicer faced death with tranquility. He was shot in Paterna, together with his brother Pedro, his comrade in the struggle. Although today courage has very little meaning, perhaps because it has no price, someone who feels the call of revolt stir within him may try to understand that on that day a courageous man died. His executioners, however, were unable to kill the symbol he represented.

The heroic life of José Pellicer is of no interest to the historians that ignore the revolution and limit themselves to arranging appearances in order to undermine the legitimacy of Francoism and little more. Nor is it of interest to the heirs of state anarchism, for whom the past is a murky chapter whose truths must be explained to the laymen from the temple of organic orthodoxy. For revolutionaries, however, or simply for those who are on the side of the truth, for those who do not see anarchist ideology as something quaint and inoffensive to be used for entertainment purposes only, the deliberate suppression of the memory of José Pellicer is more than just a crime; it is the worst insult that could be perpetrated against the ideals for which he fought and died. No one may consider himself, especially in Valencia, an anarchist, and thus a revolutionary, without maintaining in his heart the example of the greatest anarchist of all. Memory is the only thing that defeated ideas cannot do without. It is the only thing that can guide those who profess them in the present. Therefore, with regard to the human patrimony of the betrayed Spanish revolution, the biography of José Pellicer is a subject that requires further attention.

Miguel Amorós, April 27, 2004.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“José Pellicer”

Afterword to “the history of ten years”

[“The History of Ten Years”](#), published by the Encyclopédie des Nuisances (EdN) in February 1985, was intended to serve as the balance sheet of the “first epoch of the modern proletarian revolution” that began in 1968. According to the EdN the proletariat had successfully plunged the system of rule in several countries into crisis, but had hesitated before the magnitude of the historical task that the consequences of its action posed, thereby allowing the system to modernize and to go on the offensive, destroying the workers’ milieu and rendering a counterattack impossible. The EdN undertook an in-depth analysis of this defeat in the wake of which there remained neither any lines of demarcation with respect to the capitalist enemy, nor “irreversible general conclusions”. To the extent that spectacular domination occupied the social terrain the “subjective preconditions for the revolution” deteriorated and alienation ran amok. Along with the disputed territory, memory was also lost, and with memory, the very idea of an autonomous project of social organization. This irreconcilable critique allowed for a certain degree of lucidity that made possible not only the diagnosis of the ‘ills’ of the era, but also the search for an antidote. The EdN kept its distance from the leftist groupuscules and pro-situs who, identifying with an abstract proletariat and trusting in the imminent appearance of certain revolutionary “objective conditions”, thought they could spare themselves the trouble of understanding and assisting this process, and exhibited a wait-and-see attitude. But in this respect they were, at least with regard to this point, on the same ground as the S.I., which had justified its dissolution in a triumphalist manner: the S.I. was no longer necessary because the situationists were everywhere. The EdN approached the problem from the other extreme: as the post-May’68 reflux showed, the situationist proletariat that rendered theoretical reflection superfluous did not exist. Furthermore, since the merger of historical consciousness and revolt against the society of the spectacle could no longer be expected as the inevitable result of the prevailing conditions, it was necessary to plunge into said reflection and work on behalf of “a unified critical point of view” that could open up perspectives for supersession. This is why the EdN acted in the following manner: instead of propagating a new critical general theory of society, it proceeded to actualize such a critique by relating it to concrete facts of discontent, protests against “harmful phenomena”. It thereby sought to extend

the judgment passed against this world by the revolutionary theory of the preceding period, that is, by situationist theory.

By “harmful phenomena” — *nuisances* — the EdN designates not only the diverse excesses of the productive system, the harmful character of its products or the “technical” factors that threaten peoples’ lives, but also the fact of the real separation between individuals and the results of their activity, which is responsible for the execrable existence of specialists ¹. The origin of this concept and of the encyclopedist perspective must be sought in the “Theses on the S.I. and Its Time”, most pertinently in Thesis 17:

“Pollution and the proletariat are today the two concrete sides of the *critique of political economy*. The universal development of the commodity has been verified entirely as the accomplishment of political economy, that is to say as the ‘renunciation of life’. At the moment when everything has entered the sphere of economic goods, even the water of springs and the air of towns, everything has become *economic evil*. The simple immediate sensation of the ‘nuisances’ and the dangers, more oppressing every quarter, which attack first of all and principally the great majority, that is to say the poor, already constitutes an immense factor of revolt, a vital exigency of the exploited, just as *materialist* as was the struggle of the workers in the nineteenth century for the means to eat. ...” ²

Throughout its history the EdN tried to remain faithful to this line established by late situationist critique until the time it broke with the basic assumption of the compulsory revolutionary future of the “the class of consciousness”. While the essentially novel character of its critical efforts distanced it from the point of view of the S.I., the coherent extremism of situationist theory led it back to orthodoxy. This was not at all to the liking of its former collaborator and occult enemy, Guy Debord, who wrote to his factotum Martos concerning issue No. 12 of the journal: “*In this issue the S.I. is quoted more often than in the previous eleven issues. ...*” ³. The old truths of the sixties continued to be valid in the eyes of the EdN in the eighties, a position that is not exempt from contradictions, and concerning which an attempt was made to arrive at a resolution on the theoretical plane: thus, the destruction of the workers milieus did not signify the disappearance of the proletariat, “the greatest productive force”, because “the expropriation of life

¹ “Preliminary Discourse”, *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 1, Paris, November 1984.

² *The Veritable Split in the International, a Public Circular of the Situationist International*, B.M. Chronos, London, 1990. (Originally published in Paris in 1972).

³ Letter of February 29, 1988, in *Correspondance avec Guy Debord*, Paris, Le fin mot de l’Histoire, 1998. It is not at all surprising that Debord should have grasped the novelty of the encyclopedist project better than the EdN and made use of it in writing his *Commentaries*, where he assumed the total victory of the spectacle and forgot the diametrically opposed view he held in 1972. This claim is not unfounded and I expect to see it corroborated some day with the publication of the complete correspondence between Debord and the EdN, represented by Jaime Semprun and Christian Sebastiani.

exists, as well as the class struggle". These conclusions, put into question by technological development and the social atomization that put the finishing touches to the proletarian defeat, and by the irreversible character of that defeat, were confirmed again five years later in a text similar to the "History of Ten Years" entitled "Ab Ovo"⁴. The new balance sheet, however, maintained that the revolutionary project of the proletariat could not be based on the appropriation of the means of production, but on their *detournement* by the workers, as they were useless for the construction of a free life unless they were integrally transformed. Since the publication of the "Preliminary Discourse", that is, from its inception, the EdN had adhered to an anti-industrial critique, and advocated the dismantling of the productive apparatus as the historical mission of the revolutionary proletariat. It was able to learn something from reading certain intellectually honest authors, not connected with the radical milieu but knowledgeable in the development of this critique (Ellul, Charbonneau, Mumford, etc.). Following the trail blazed by Hannah Arendt⁵, the EdN defined this society as the society of atomized masses and spectacular democracy as the new edition of the totalitarian system, without police terrorism or Nazi party, and, although not without difficulty, linked these themes to the usual concept of the proletariat, the typical element of class society, completely unlike the proletarian class that exists today. But the existence of the proletariat was guaranteed by a new definition: it was the subject of the struggles against harmful phenomena, characterized by the ideologists of domination as struggles "for defense of the environment" or ecological struggles. Having disappeared from the factories, the class struggle survives in this new form. The outbreaks of anti-nuclear contestation and the general crisis of the bureaucracy, as manifested in the collapse of the soviet system, the Chinese revolt and the exciting setbacks suffered by the Polish communist party, encouraged optimism, but the EdN stuck to their guns with or without optimism, trusting to the prospect of a collective formation of a critical point of view in the struggles against harmful phenomena, and although it no longer viewed situationist theory as "nothing but the general expression of the real historical movement", it did consider it to be "a minimum" that must be reinforced and developed.

This back-and-forth with the S.I. was typical of the EdN throughout its history. It was capable of posing the social question on its real historical coordinates and was even able to supply some unacceptable ideas to the era, but the prestige of the most radical theory of its time was more than it could encompass. For the

⁴ "Ab Ovo", *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 14, Paris, November 1989.

⁵ *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, Schocken Books, New York, 1951.

members of the EdN, situationist theory was not a closed system of knowledge that had its place in a past epoch, with great merits but undergoing a process of recuperation by the dominant system, but rather, as Hegel would say, a valid theory which, by being chronologically the latest, resulted from all its precedents and contained all their principles. Although traces of a *different* objective critique are to be found in every issue of their journal, and this is how they understood and denounced their enemies, the only critical analysis that it expressly published was largely *ad hominem*; it refers to the practice of the S.I. rather than to the logical insufficiencies of a theoretical type that appeared in response to a completely new situation ⁶. Harmful phenomena were defined as the final contradiction between the forces of production and the relations of production, and the struggle against harmful phenomena was transformed into a reworked version of the class struggle. With this rescue operation by transference the evidence that the classical workers movement had died out was circumvented, along with the evidence that subsequent struggles would suffer the consequences of this defeat and would necessarily be weak and limited. A class cannot be reconstructed almost *ex nihilo* and much less become the central force that could paralyze society. What appeared as minor contradictions in the “History of Ten Years” became ideological obstacles in “Ab Ovo”. This error would be manifested in practice (the encyclopedists always were more activists than theoreticians), as it was soon *directly* proven that the struggles against harmful phenomena were easily recuperated by ecologists, local politicians and municipal representatives, preventing the participants from being exposed to the least bit of revolutionary critique; proof of the absolute lack of class consciousness in the environmental crisis. Of course the proletariat exists, perhaps it is more numerous than ever; but it does not exist in the form of a class. Because it was dispersed in mass society it ceased to exist “for itself”, it disavowed its truth and was in no position to recover it in any struggle. Proletarianized, expropriated individuals found themselves locked into the miseries of their private life, and this voluntary seclusion was so profound that no general interest, no class interest, could crystallize from so much particularity. The great success of domination was the *total separation* of individuals, the basis of modern capitalism and political fascism. The new “working class”, the proletariat that suffers the effects of harmful phenomena and knows it, can only be the abstract negation of the renovated and transformed ruling class, but it is by no means a real historical subject. The EdN was not mistaken when it postulated harmful phenomena as the essence of commodity production and called attention to the principally noxious character of separation;

⁶ “Abrégé” (“Compendium”), *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, No. 15, Paris, April 1992.

its error consisted in having confronted such evidence with the hopes it placed in proletarian recomposition. The enigma of the proletariat was resolved later, when the EdN was no longer an organized group and was only sporadically active. In the nineties, the new era fully illuminated the real scope of the dispossession and misery of individuals, which was barely discernable ten years before. Situationist subversion was recuperated with impunity by the cultural and media apparatus of domination and transformed into “the last form of the revolutionary spectacle”⁷. Through its analysis of the strikes of December 1995 in France the EdN encountered a proletariat that was a spectator of itself, whose struggles took place within the communications media and were managed by the employees of the latter. The EdN posthumously broke with the situationist tradition and went beyond it, denouncing a virtual class struggle, a media phenomenon and a mass spectacle⁸.

All the evidence indicates that the ruling unreason has run its course and has finished building its world. The social terrain upon which critical reflection could be born is disappearing rapidly along with the likelihood of the emergence of a historical subject that could initiate such reflection. The revolution, securely contained by the mechanisms of recuperation, is no longer scandalous. Since the gestures of revolt have become commodity values, revolt is impossible. The terrain is ripe for any sort of aberrant ideology, and it has been noted that there is a need for a radical critical theory that would help us grasp reality and elucidate a strategy to transform it that is neither ambiguous nor fundamentalist, but given the sad condition of individuals subjected to the imperatives of the economy, and taking into account the currently operative mechanisms of repression and control, the crucial issue will no longer be interpreting the world but surviving in the extremely alienating conditions that rule it; when a ship is sinking a treatise on navigation is of less interest than knowing how to build a life-raft. To save oneself from the destructive and homogenizing steamroller of global capitalism, under present circumstances, one will need, as Jaime Semprun says with a touch of ironic humor, a manual on gardening⁹. The degeneration of human beings has reached the point where it is hard to imagine that the world will end up in anything else than barbarism, when, if we take a moment to think about it, we are already being immersed in it. There is an urgent need for tactics of immediate resistance, the circulation of ideas, the safeguarding of public debate, the practice of effective solidarity, the affirmation of the subversive will, the preservation of

⁷ Letter from Debord, “To all the Situationists”, January 28, 1971, in Volume 4 of Debord’s *Correspondance*, published by Fayard, Paris, 2004.

⁸ “Observaciones sobre la Parálisis de Diciembre”, *Encyclopédie des Nuisances*, Paris, 1996.

⁹ “El Fantasma de la Teoría”, Jaime Semprun, in *Nouvelles de nulle part*, No. 4, September 2003, Paris.

personal dignity, secession from the world of the commodity, the preservation of memory, the maintenance of a minimum of autonomous critical speech. ... that is, everything that preserves some light in the chaos and neutralizes the recuperators. In the best case, the revolutionary critique will emerge, and in the worst, it will not matter whether it emerges or not.

Miguel Amorós, November 2004.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“Postfacio a la ‘Historia de diez años’”

On Workers Autonomy

The word “autonomy” has been used in connection with the cause of proletarian emancipation for many years. In *The Communist Manifesto* Marx defined the workers movement as “the autonomous [independent] movement of the immense majority in the interest of the immense majority”. Later, Proudhon, reflecting on the experiences of 1848, asserted in *On the Political Capacity of the Working Classes* (1865) that for any class to act in a specific manner it would have to fulfill three requirements for autonomy: it should be conscious of itself, that as a consequence of this consciousness it should affirm “its idea”, that is, that it should be aware of “the law of its existence” and that it should know how “to express it in words and to explain it by means of reason”, and that it should draw practical conclusions from this idea. Both Marx and Proudhon were witnesses to the influence of the radical bourgeoisie on the ranks of the workers and tried to get the proletariat to politically separate itself from this influence. In 1890, in London, there was a group of German anarchist exiles whose journal was called *Autonomy*, which emphasized individual liberty and the independence of political groups. In 1920 the Marxist Karl Korsch designated “industrial autonomy” as a higher form of socialization which he would later discover in the libertarian collectives of 1936. The theoretician of workers councils, Pannekoek, spoke instead of “self-activity” (like Marx), referring to the independent action of the workers, their self-government, which is the same as workers autonomy. Today, the use of the words “autonomy” or “autonomous” in all kinds of situations and with the most diverse intentions is more a factor of confusion than of clarification. They can be found issuing from the mouth of a member of the civil society movement or a nationalist, pronounced by a college student follower of Toni Negri or spoken by a squatter... The words therefore define different realities and respond to distinct concepts. The Autonomous Anticapitalist Commandos took that name in order to indicate their non-hierarchical character and to distance themselves from the ETA. The gelatinous Castoriadis (in conformance the dictionary definition of the word) called the responsible citizen of a society capable of providing itself with its own laws “autonomous”, a kind of bourgeois with angel’s wings, but in other milieus one calls oneself “autonomous” if one does not want to define oneself as an anarchist, in order to avoid the reductionism implied by that term, and the follower of an Italian fashion trend which is

manifested in various and quite dissimilar versions, the worst of them being the one invented by professor Negri in 1977 when he was a creative Leninist, is also an “autonomist”... Workers autonomy possesses an unequivocal meaning which was revealed during a particular period of real history: as such, it appeared on the peninsula at the beginning of the seventies as the fundamental conclusion of the class struggle of the previous decade.

Before Autonomy

It was not by chance that when the workers began to radicalize their movement they demanded “autonomy”, that is, their independence from external representatives, whether from the vertical bureaucracy of the state, the opposition parties or the clandestine trade union groups. For them this meant acting in common, directly managing their own affairs with their own rules, making their own decisions and defining their strategy and their tactics in the struggle: in short, constituting themselves as a revolutionary class. The modern workers movement, i.e., the one which appeared after the civil war, arose during the sixties, once the movement that was represented by the CNT and the UGT had run its course. Most of the workers who comprised it were from a peasant background, having immigrated to the cities where they resided in the outskirts of the urban areas in “cheap housing” in apartment blocks and shacks. After 1958, when Franco’s first Development Plan was implemented, industry and services underwent a strong burst of growth which was translated into a generalized demand for labor. The ensuing depopulation of the countryside and the demise of traditional agriculture were accompanied by the birth of a new type of worker in the urban shantytowns. The conditions of the exploitation of the working population of that era—low wages, long hours, sub-standard housing, long commutes, deficient infrastructure, illiteracy, servile habits—transformed these workers into an abandoned and marginal class which nonetheless knew how to start all over and defend its dignity. Their protest was filtered through the churches and the interstices of the Vertical Trade Union, which were soon both revealed to be stifling dead ends. In Madrid, Vizcaya, Asturias, Barcelona and other cities, the workers, together with their representatives elected within the framework of the law of the Francoist factory committees, began to meet in assemblies to address labor issues, establishing an informal network of contacts which constituted the basic framework for the original “Workers Commissions”. These commissions operated within the existing legal framework although, given the limitations of the latter, often exceeded these bounds or ignored them altogether when necessary. The informal structure of the Workers Commissions, their self-

established reformist limitations and their Catholic-Vertical cover were at first effective during an intensively repressive era; they launched important strikes that aroused a new class consciousness under the shadow of the Law of Collective Agreements. But as class consciousness became more pronounced, the workers struggle was not understood simply as a fight against the boss, but as a fight against capital and the state in the form of Franco's dictatorship. The final goal of the struggle was nothing less than "socialism", or the appropriation of the means of production by the workers themselves. After May '68, the word used was "self-management". The Workers Commissions had to assume this goal and radicalize their methods by opening their doors to all the workers. The Franco regime soon became aware of the danger and suppressed the Workers Commissions; the militant workers parties—the PCE and the FLP—soon noticed their usefulness as political instruments and recuperated them.

The only possibility for trade unionism was that offered by the regime, which was why the PCE and its Catholic allies took advantage of the opportunity by constructing one trade union within the other, official one. The increasing influence of the PCE after 1968 bolstered the reformist trends in the Commissions and helped prevent their radicalization. The consequences would have been grave had the PCE's implantation been more deeply rooted: on the one hand, the workers representation was separated from the assemblies and escaped the control of the rank and file. Action became the exclusive prerogative of the supposed leaders. Furthermore, the workers movement was circumscribed by a legalist practice, avoiding any resort to strikes whenever possible, and the strike was only used as a demonstration of the leader's power. The workers struggle lost its recently acquired anti-capitalist character. Finally, the struggle was depoliticized as the communists assumed control of the leadership of the movement. The political goals were changed from those of "socialism" to those of bourgeois democracy. The script was clear: the "Workers Commissions" had become interlocutors for the bosses in labor negotiations, totally bypassing the workers. This supposed trade union dialogue was nothing but the reflection of the institutional political dialogue pursued by the PCE. Stalinist reformism did not emerge victorious, but provoked a split in the workers movement by dragging the most moderate and supine fraction of the workers into bourgeoisification; however, class consciousness had developed sufficiently to allow the most advanced sectors of the working class to advocate more suitable tactics, first within and then outside of the Commissions, triggering the formation of more combative rank and file organizations known, depending on their location, as "circles", "commission platforms", "workers committees" or "autonomous workers groups". For the first time, the word "autonomous" was used in the Barcelona area to emphasize the

independence of a group which supported direct democracy against the parties and any organization alien to the class. Furthermore, since a legal loophole permitted the formation of neighborhood associations, the struggle spread to the residential districts and penetrated the arena of everyday life. In this case as well, in the shantytowns and poorer neighborhoods, the question was posed concerning whether to remain within the institutional framework of the existing groups or to organize neighborhood committees and to treat the neighborhood assembly as a representative institution.

The Era of Autonomy

The Franco regime's resistance to even the slightest reformist proposal made the strikes that followed the 1969 construction workers strike in Granada, as savage and as hard-fought as they always were at that time, impossible to conduct under the aegis of legality that the Stalinists wanted to preserve. The anti-capitalist workers understood that, instead of waiting at the doors of the CNS to find out the results of the measures taken by their legal representatives, what had to be done was to convene assemblies in the factories themselves or their neighborhoods and elect their delegates there, delegates that were not to be permanent, but revocable at any time. If only in order to resist repression a delegate had to be elected for the period between assemblies, and a strike committee's mandate was valid for as long as the strike lasted. The assembly was sovereign because it represented all the workers. The old tactic of forcing the boss to negotiate with "illegal" assembly delegates, by spreading the struggle to other branches of industry or by transforming the strike into a general strike by means of "pickets", that is, by "direct action", found supporters every time. Along with solidarity, class consciousness made great progress, while demonstrations ever more scandalously confirmed this advance. The workers had lost their fear of repression and confronted it in the streets. Each demonstration was not only a protest against the bosses, but, by constituting a breach of public order, was also a challenge to the political authority of the state. If the proletariat wanted to move forward it had to separate itself from all those who spoke in its name—who were legion due to the proliferation of groups and parties to the left of the PCE—and who attempted to lead it. The proletariat had to "self-organize", or "conquer its autonomy", as was said in May 1968. People then began to speak of "proletarian autonomy", of "autonomous struggles", meaning struggles which took place on the margins of the parties, and of "autonomous groups", groups of revolutionary workers carrying out autonomous practical activities within the working class with the clear objective of contributing to the class's "becoming conscious". Even taking their historical and ideological differences into account, the autonomous groups

could only be just like the “affinity” groups of the old pre-1937 FAI. The early seventies saw the conclusion of the industrialization process undertaken by the Francoist technocrats, with the undesired result of the crystallization of a new working class which was increasingly more convinced of its historic possibilities and which was ready to fight. The fear of the proletariat compelled the Franco regime to implement a perpetual authoritarianism, against which even the new bourgeois and religious values conspired. After the death of the dictator, the repression was relaxed just enough to allow the outbreak of an unstoppable strike wave all over the country. Stalinist trade union reformism was completely swamped. The constant assemblies held to resolve the real problems of the workers on the job, in their neighborhoods and even in their homes, did not face a bureaucratic apparatus that could restrain them. The links between the Commissions and communist party leaders were only tolerated when they did not cause an inconvenience, as the latter were obliged to convene assemblies if they wanted to exercise even the least control over the movement. The working class masses began to become aware of their role as the principle subject in the unfolding events and rejected a political-trade unionist regulatory approach to the problems of their real lives. In 1976 the ideas of self-organization, generalized self-management and social revolution could easily express the immediate desires of the masses. The road was still open. The social dynamic of the assemblies encouraged the workers to take their affairs into their own hands, beginning with their own autonomy. This autonomous mode of action, which led the masses to dare to venture onto what had previously been territory that was off-limits, was sure to bring about real panic in the ruling class, which machine-gunned the workers in Vitoria, liquidated the conservatives’ version of reform of Francoism, dissolved the Vertical Trade Union along with the Commissions within it and legalized the parties and trade unions. The Moncloa Pact signed by all the parties and trade unions was a pact against the assemblies. We shall not pause here to narrate the subsequent vicissitudes of the assembly movement, or to count the number of fallen workers; it suffices to say that the movement was defeated in 1978 after three years of arduous struggles. The Labor Law promulgated by the new “democratic” regime in 1980 constituted a legal condemnation of the assemblies. The trade union elections provided a contingent of professional representatives who, with the assistance of the accommodationist assemblyists, hijacked the leadership of the struggles. This does not mean that the assemblies disappeared; what actually disappeared was their independence and their autonomy, and this deviation was followed by an irreversible degradation of class consciousness which not even the resistance to the economic restructuring of the eighties could halt.

Autonomy and Workers Councils

The theory that was best able to serve workers autonomy was not anarcho-syndicalism, but councilist theory, of the kind formulated by the Dutch and German revolutionary communists who drew upon the Russian and German experiences. The structure of the “unitary trade unions” corresponded to a long-superseded stage of Spanish capitalism in which small businesses were predominant and a peasant majority subsisted on the margins. Spanish capitalism was then expanding and the trade union was an eminently defensive proletarian institution. Those who are acquainted with pre-civil war history are aware of the problems which were caused by the trade union mentality when the workers had to defend themselves from the bosses’ terrorism between 1920 and 1924, or when they had to resist the state corporative institutions that the Primo de Rivera dictatorship sought to impose, or during the years 1931-1933 when the workers tried to go on the offensive by means of insurrections. Organizing trade unions in 1976, even “unitary” trade unions, in a highly developed capitalism that was undergoing a crisis, meant integrating the workers into a shrinking labor market and carrying on with the mission of the Workers Commissions of the Franco regime. Syndicalism, even if it claims to be revolutionary, has no choice but to carry out defensive actions within capitalism. “Direct action” and “direct democracy” were no longer possible in the shadow of the trade unions. Modern conditions of struggle required another form of organization adapted to the new times because, when faced with a paralyzed capitalist offensive, the proletariat must go on the offensive. The assemblies, pickets and strike committees were the appropriate unitary institutions. What they needed in order to become Workers Councils was more widespread and more consistent coordination and the consciousness of what they were doing. It could have happened at any moment: in Vitoria, Elche, Gavà...but it was not enough. To what extent, then, did councilist theory, as the most realistic expression of the workers movement, assist the “class called to action” to become conscious of the nature of its project by indicating the way forward? Very little. The theory of the councils had many more unconscious practitioners than actual supporters. The assemblies and representative committees were spontaneous organs of the struggle which were not yet fully conscious of their simultaneous role as effective organs of workers power. As the strikes spread, the functions of the assemblies were enlarged and embraced questions that did not involve the workplace. The power of the assemblies affected all the institutions of Capital and the State, including the parties and the trade unions, which worked together to neutralize it. It seems that the only ones who were not aware of this power were the workers themselves. The slogan, “All

power to the assemblies”, meant no power to the parties, the trade unions and the State, or else it was meaningless. By not seriously examining the problems to which its own power gave rise the workers offensive never quite gelled. It was easier for the workers to renounce their primordial antipathy to trade unionism and to avail themselves of those customary intermediaries between Capital and Labor, the trade unions. In the absence of any revolutionary perspectives the assemblies became useless and boring and the Workers Councils unviable. The Council system can only function as a form of struggle of a revolutionary working class, and in 1978 that class turned its back on a second revolution.

Bad Autonomies

An enormous strategic error that undoubtedly contributed to the defeat was the decision by the majority of the autonomous activists in the factories and neighborhoods to participate in the reconstruction of the CNT with the naïve expectation that they would thereby create a rallying point for all antiauthoritarians. A mountain of collective coordination evaporated. The experiment quickly failed but the price paid in demobilization was high. The vulgar workerism that was manifested in the “class autonomy” tendency also contributed to the defeat, with its support for collaboration with the trade unions and submerging the assemblies in the trade union morass of separate partial reforms and the self-management of misery (transforming bankrupt factories into cooperatives, running “autonomous” electoral candidates, supporting mixed trade union-assembly representation, using conciliatory language, etc.). It is characteristic of those times that the revolutionaries were correct in saying that the greatest enemies of the proletariat posed as supporters of the assemblies in order to more easily sabotage them. This was true of dozens of groupuscules and “movements”. “Italian-style” autonomy had little influence, however, since its importation as a Leninoid ideology took place at the end of the period of the assemblies and its intoxicating effects took hold *post festum*. In reality, what was imported from Italy were not the practices of the 1977 movement in various Italian cities which was baptized as “Autonomia Operaia”, but the most backward and spectacular aspect of that “autonomy”, which corresponded to the decomposition of Milanese Bolshevism — Potere Operaio — and especially the literary masturbations of those whom the press celebrated as its leaders, i.e., Negri, Piperno, Scalzone... In short, very few groups were consistently engaged in the active defense of workers autonomy, besides the Workers for Proletarian Autonomy (libertarian councilists), a few factory collectives (e.g., those at Fasa-Renault, Roca Radiators, Barcelona longshoremen....) and the Autonomous Groups. We shall pause now to examine the latter in more detail.

Armed Autonomy

The “1,000” organization, or MIL (Movimiento Ibérico de Liberación), a pioneer in so many things, gave itself the name of “Autonomous Combat Groups” (GAC) in 1972. The armed struggle made its debut with the purpose of helping the working class, not replacing it. They took the name “autonomous” from the groups that were engaged in 1974 to support and win the release of the MIL prisoners—which the police called the OLLA – and the groups that followed in their footsteps in 1976, which, after a debate in the Segovia prison, adopted the name “Grupos Autónomos” or GGAA (in 1979). Although hindsight is, as they say, 20-20, we must nonetheless point out that the pretense of being the “armed faction of the revolutionary proletariat” was not just debatable but also false as a matter of principle. All the groups, whether or not they engaged in armed struggle, were separate groups that only represented themselves, which is what “autonomous” really meant in that context. This kind of autonomy, by the way, would have had to question the existence within the MIL of a specialization of tasks that divided the membership into theoreticians and activists. The proletariat represents itself as a class through its own institutions. And it never takes up arms except when it is necessary, when it is ready to destroy the state. But in that case, not a fraction but the whole class is armed, forming its militias, “the proletariat in arms”. The existence of armed groups, even if they place themselves at the service of wildcat strikes, contributes nothing to the autonomy of the struggle, insofar as they are composed of people who are at the margins of the assemblies’ collective decision making and outside their control. They comprised a separate power and rather than helping the assemblies they could have posed a threat to them if they were infiltrated by spies or provocateurs. During that phase of the struggle, the pickets were sufficient. The most radical practices of the class struggle were not the expropriations or the fireworks in businesses and government offices. The really radical contributions were those efforts that helped the proletariat to go on the offensive: the generalization of insubordination against all hierarchy, the sabotage of capitalist production and consumption, the wildcat strikes, the revocable delegates, the coordination of struggles, its self-defense, the creation of specifically working class information networks, the rejection of nationalism and of trade unionism, the occupations of factories and public buildings, the barricades.... The contribution to proletarian autonomy made by the groups mentioned above was limited by their voluntarist stance with regard to the question of armed struggle.

In the case of the Autonomous Groups, it is clear that they wanted to move among the masses and pursued their maximum radicalization, but the clandestine conditions imposed by the armed struggle isolated them from the masses. They were completely lucid concerning what was needed for the extension of the class struggle, that is, concerning the question of proletarian autonomy. They were acquainted with the legacy of May '68 and condemned all ideology as an element of separation, even the ideology of autonomy, since in the times of ferment the enemies of autonomy are the first to proclaim their support for autonomy. According to one of their communiqués, the group's autonomy was "not simply a common practice founded upon a minimum shared framework for action, but was also based on an autonomous theory corresponding to our way of life, of struggle, and our concrete needs".

They took the libertarian "L" to avoid being pigeonholed within the spectacular anarchism vs. Marxism opposition, as well as to prevent their recuperation as anarchists by the CNT, which, as a trade union organization, they considered to be bureaucratic, accommodationist and tolerant of the existence of wage labor and therefore of capital. They had no intention of being permanent organizations like the parties because they rejected power; all truly autonomous groups organized for certain concrete tasks and dissolved themselves when these tasks were concluded. The repression abruptly brought them to an end, but the nature of their practice was revealed as much by their exemplary, and therefore edifying, errors as by their successes.

Autonomous Technology

An abyss separates the proletarian milieu of the sixties and seventies from today's globalized and technology-saturated world. We are living in a radically different reality built upon the ruins of the previous one. The workers movement has disappeared, so speaking of "autonomy", whether Iberian or any other kind, makes no sense if by doing so we are trying to attach ourselves to a non-existent image of the proletariat and to build an illusory program of action upon that image based on someone else's shattered ideology. In the worst case this would imply the resurrection of the Leninist cadaver and the idea of the "vanguard", which are diametrically opposed to autonomy. Nor is autonomy a matter of amusing oneself in cyberspace, or in the "movement of movements", demanding the democratization of the established order by participating in the institutions of the would-be representatives of civil society. There is no civil society; that society has been broken up into its constituent elements, the individuals, and the latter are not only separated from the results and the

products of their activity, but they are also separated from one another. All the freedom which capitalist society is capable of offering rests not upon the association of autonomous individuals but upon their separation and ever more complete dispossession, so that an individual does not discover a means to obtain his freedom in another individual, but a competitor and an obstacle. This separation is being consummated by digital technology as virtual communication. In order to relate to one another, individuals depend absolutely on technological means, but what they get is not real contact but a relation in the aether. In its most extreme form, the individuals who are addicted to such equipment are incapable of carrying on direct relations with their own kind. Information and communications technologies have given new life to the old bourgeois project that sought to achieve the total separation of individuals from one another and have in turn spawned the illusion of individual autonomy thanks to the network function which these technologies have made possible. On the one hand, they create an individual who is totally dependent upon machines, and therefore neurotic and perfectly controllable; on the other hand, they impose the conditions in which all social activity takes place, they define its rhythms and demand a permanent adaptation to change. Therefore, what has conquered autonomy is not the individual but technology. Nonetheless, if individual autonomy is impossible under the current conditions of production, the struggle for autonomy is not impossible, although it must not be reduced to a strategy for opting out of the technologically equipped capitalist mode of survival. Refusing to work, to consume, to use electronic devices, to own a car, to live in cities, etc., in and of itself constitutes a vast program, but survival under capitalism imposes its rules. Personal autonomy is not simple self-sufficiency at the cost of the isolation and marginalization of those who escape from the cell phone and the email. The struggle against these rules and constraints is today the ABC of individual autonomy and can be pursued in many ways, all of them legitimate. Sabotage will be supplemented by learning a dying craft or practicing barter. As for collective action, conscious mass movements are impossible today, because there is no class consciousness. Masses are exactly the opposite of classes. Without a working class it is absurd to speak of "workers autonomy", but it is not absurd to speak of autonomous groups. Current conditions are not so disastrous as to prevent the organization of groups for the purpose of carrying out concrete defensive actions. The advance of spectacular capitalism is always effected by means of aggression, which must be answered wherever possible: against High Speed Trains, Wind Farms, incinerators, golf courses, dams, sports stadiums, highways, power lines, vacation developments, ski resorts, shopping malls, real estate speculation,

temporary and part time work, genetically modified organisms... It is a matter of establishing lines of resistance from which an environment that is opposed to capitalism can be reconstructed, in which revolutionary consciousness will once again crystallize. If the world is not ready for grand strategies, if it is instead ready for guerrilla actions, then the most suitable organizational formula is that of autonomous groups. This is the kind of autonomy that is of interest.

Miquel Amorós.

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“¿qué fue la autonomía obrera?”

The Avatars of Culture as Commodity

The word “culture” is derived from the Latin *colere*, which means to till, to farm, to cultivate. The first person to use the word in the sense of spiritual cultivation, of improving one’s intellectual and moral faculties, was Cicero. It has been suggested that the Romans may have invented this concept to translate the Greek word, *padeia*. According to Hannah Arendt, the Romans conceived of culture in relation to nature and associated it with paying homage to and respecting the works of the past. “Worship” [in Spanish, *culto* — translator’s note] has the same etymological root as culture. Even today, when we speak of culture, we commonly associate it with such notions of nature transformed by labor and monuments of the past, although the reality of culture has not had anything to do with such notions for a long time.

Culture understood as a separate sphere of society where creation is freely exercised, as an activity which is its own justification, is an idealized image. This kind of autonomy has one weak spot. Culture passed through the royal courts, it was lodged in monasteries and churches, it was sponsored by the Maecenases of the palaces and the salons. When the latter abandoned it, it was purchased by the bourgeoisie. The enjoyment of culture has been the privilege of the leisure class, those who are free of the compulsion to labor. Until the 18th century culture was the patrimony of the aristocracy; afterwards, it became part of the heritage of the bourgeoisie. Writers and artists have tried to preserve their freedom by guarding the independence of the process of creation and living on the margins of social convention, but in the final accounting it is the bourgeoisie who pay for the final result, i.e., for the work.

The bourgeoisie sets the price, whether the work of art gives them pleasure or provokes and shocks them. Whether it is useful or perfectly useless. For the bourgeoisie, culture is an object of prestige; whoever possesses it rises on the social scale. Ruling class demand therefore determines the formation of a market for culture. For the bourgeoisie, culture is value just like everything else, exchange value, a commodity. Even the works that reject their commodity status, question commodified culture, and impose their own rules, are also commodities. Their value consists precisely in their ability to break with the past, since they stimulate innovation, which is essential for the market. Culture in conflict with the bourgeoisie is the bourgeois culture of the future.

Culture under bourgeois rule failed because it walled itself off as a special sphere of production of the human spirit and remained aloof from the transformation of society. The vanguards of the early 20th century — futurists, Dadaists, constructivists, expressionists, surrealists — tried to correct this error by inventing and disseminating new subversive values, new corrosive ways of life, but the bourgeoisie knew how to trivialize and expropriate them. Its secret consisted in preventing the formation of a general point of view. The best discoveries were sterilized by being separated from a comprehensive context of experimentation and critique. Market mechanisms and specialization raised a wall between the creators and the revolutionary workers movement, which could have provided a basis for the accentuation of all the subversive aspects of their works. Artists then renounced any attempt to change the world and accepted their jobs as fragmented disciplines, which can produce only degraded and inoffensive works.

Of signal importance is the fact that when ordinary people are proletarianized, popular culture disappears. The capitalist system subjects the people to wage slavery and the cultured bourgeoisie discovers and appropriates its folklore. The first specifically bourgeois culture was romanticism. As it coincided with a revolutionary period, it is simultaneously apologetic and critical; it both praises and questions bourgeois values. Its critical aspect influenced the working class. When the proletariat conceived of the project of appropriating social wealth in order to put it at everybody's disposal it became aware of its cultural isolation and laid claim to culture — at first its romantic variety — as an indispensable instrument for its emancipation. Its libraries, cultural centers, rationalist schools and educational publications reveal the will of the workers to have their own culture, seized from the bourgeoisie and removed from the market so as to benefit everyone. It devolved upon the cultural vanguard, a movement that made a clean slate with the past, to ensure that the workers' *detournement* of bourgeois culture did not introduce the latter's ideological defects into the proletarian milieu, but would instead lead to really new and revolutionary values. Should this have taken place, one would have been able to speak of an authentic proletarian culture. It was not to be. The workers' own victories, especially those that led to a shorter working day, were used against them. Leisure was proletarianized and the daily life of millions of workers was opened up to capitalism. Domination availed itself of two powerful weapons created by the rationalization of the productive process: the state educational system and the mass media of cinema, radio and television. On the one hand there was a bureaucratic culture, dedicated to transmitting the ideas of the ruling class, and on the other, an unprecedented expansion of the culture

market that led to the creation of a culture industry. The creator and the intellectual could choose between the desk of the functionary or the dressing room of the entertainer.

“The preliminary condition required for propelling workers to the status of ‘free’ producers and consumers of commodity time was the violent expropriation of their own time.” (Debord)

The spectacle began to become a reality with this dispossession initiated by the culture industry. By way of a technological trick of domination, the abolition of bourgeois privilege did not introduce the working masses into culture, it introduced them into the spectacle. Leisure did not free them but only put the finishing touches on their slavery.

“Free” time is free only in name. No one can freely dispose of their time if they do not possess the tools needed to construct their everyday lives. So-called free time exists in social conditions lacking in freedom. The relations of production absolutely determine individuals’ existence and the degree of freedom they must possess. This freedom is exercised within the market. In his leisure time the individual desires the supply imposed upon him by the market. The more freedom, the greater the imposition, that is, more slavery. Free time is constant activity; it is thus a prolongation of labor time and takes on the characteristics of labor: routine, fatigue, boredom, brutalization. For the individual, recreation is no longer imposed upon him for the purpose of allowing him to restore the forces used up in labor, but in order to further employ those same forces in consumption. “Amusement under late capitalism is the *prolongation* of work” (Adorno).

Culture enters the domain of leisure and becomes mass culture. If bourgeois class society employed cultural products as commodities, mass society consumes them. They no longer serve the purpose of self-improvement or social climbing; their function is entertainment and killing time. The new culture is entertainment and entertainment is now culture. It involves amusement, killing time, rather than educating, much less liberating the spirit. To be diverted is to evade, not to think, and therefore to accommodate oneself to existing conditions. In this way the misery of everyday life becomes endurable. Industrial and bureaucratic culture does not confront the individual with the society that represses his desires, but with the society that domesticates his instincts, obstructs his initiative and exacerbates his intellectual poverty. It seeks to standardize the individual by turning him into a stereotype that corresponds to the subject of domination, that is, the spectator. Industrial culture transforms the entire world into a “public”. The public is by definition passive, its behavior is based on psychological identification with the television

hero, with the actress, with the leader. These are the models of false self-realization that belong to an alienated life. The image is predominant over every other form of expression. The spectator never intervenes, he passes the buck; he never protests, he is instead the background of the protest. Furthermore, if rebel behavior is becoming a cultural fashion this is because protest has become a commodity. Recent examples include the Madrid “Movida” [a cultural movement that originated in Madrid during the post-Franco transition to democracy between 1975 and 1982 that sought to capitalize on the new environment of political and cultural freedom by introducing innovative films, fashions and art onto the market — translator’s note] or its counterpart, the Barcelona counterculture of the seventies. The real purpose of the spectacle of contestation is to integrate revolt, revealing the degree of domestication or the level of idiocy of the participants. The spectacle endeavors to generalize the vulgar moments of life as much as possible by disguising them as heroic and unique. Amidst the utter prostration of egalitarian and libertarian ideas, the spectacle stands alone in constructing situations, the kind of situations in which individuals ignore everything that is not entertaining. This is how the spectator is incubated, a dispersed being whom the everyday regime of images “has deprived of his world, cut off from all relationships and rendered incapable of any focus” (Anders).

Besides being frivolous, the products of industrial culture are ephemeral, as their supply must constantly be renewed since the regime of everyday life follows the whims of fashion, and in fashion constant change rules. Fashion only exists in the present. Even the past acquires a contemporaneous quality: marketing can present *El Quijote* as a book that is hot off the press and Goya as a trendy new painter. The flood of information that bombards the spectator is decontextualized, stripped of historical perspective, and directed at minds that are prepared to receive it, minds that are malleable, without memory, and therefore indifferent to history. Spectators live only in the now. Submerged in a perpetual present, they are childlike beings, incapable of distinguishing between banal entertainment and public activity. They do not want to grow up; they want to tarry eternally in adolescence. They believe that silly make-believe is the most fitting sort of behavior for public affairs, as it is the only kind that arises spontaneously from their puerile existence. This spectacular positive appraisal of playful parody generalizes the world of infancy, where the adults must be confined. Infantilization definitively separates the spectator public from the real actors, the leaders. The reality is more than perverse: protest can barely survive the manipulations of infiltrated recuperators, but it will never survive comic

portrayal. Ludic ideology is the good conscience of minds that have been infantilized by the spectacle.

The integrated spectacle reigns where state culture and industrial culture have merged. Both follow the same rules. The increasing importance of leisure in modern production was one of the driving forces of the process of economic tertiarization that is characteristic of globalization. Culture, as an object to be consumed during leisure time, has been developed as a productive force. It creates jobs, stimulates consumption, and attracts tourists. Cultural tourism is common everywhere now that the supply of culture is a high priority in the cities. The culture industry has diversified and now the culture market is global. Culture is exported and imported like chicken. Technological advances in the transport sector favor this globalization; garbage, as the communications media demonstrate, is the same for everybody. In the remotest corner of the world one hears "Macarena". The new technologies — internet, video, DVD, fiber optics, cable television, cell phones — have accelerated the globalizing process of bureaucratic-industrial culture; they have also provided a new territory: virtual space. In this new dimension the spectacle makes a qualitative leap. Here, all the characteristics of the above-mentioned culture, i.e., banalization, one-dimensionality, frivolity, superficiality, the ideology of play, eclecticism, fragmentation, etc., reach unprecedented heights. Computer culture exactly fulfills the program of the colonization of everyday life by projecting the realization of desires into the null space of virtuality. The "interactive" quality allowed by the new technologies breaks some of the spectacle's rules in the electromagnetic aether, such as passivity or one-way transmission, and as a result the spectator can communicate with others and actively participate, but only as a ghost. The virtual alter-ego can be anything it wants within the technological matrix, especially anything the real being will never be in real space-time, and by way of this doubling of the self the individual contributes to his own imbecility and therefore to his own annihilation. Modern alienation is manifested through the new mechanisms of evasion as a kind of schizophrenia.

In the current historical phase, and insofar as a project opposed to the dominant system is conceivable, the recovery of culture as a Ciceronian *cultura animi* does not imply patient dedication to learning, or a craftsman-like cultivation of skill, or a militant restitution of memory. It is above all a practice of cultural sabotage inseparable from a total critique of domination. Culture died long ago and has been replaced by a bureaucratic and industrial substitute. This is why anyone who speaks of culture — or art, or the recovery of historical memory — without reference to the revolutionary transformation of social life, speaks with a corpse in his mouth. All activity in this domain must be inscribed

within a unitary project of total subversion; all creation must as a result be fundamentally destructive. One must not take flight from conflict; one must think seriously about it and remain within it.

Miguel Amorós

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“Los avatares de la cultura como mercancía”

Technological Society — Mass Society

“Without automobiles, without airplanes,
and without loudspeakers, we could not have
seized power in Germany.”

— Hitler

The loss of class consciousness after the defeat of the most recent proletarian assault on capitalist society obliges us to revise Marx’s famous dictum and say instead that it is no longer a matter of transforming the world but rather of interpreting it. Now more than ever, in order to change the world we must understand it. We repudiate self-satisfied activism, but we do not renounce practice nor are we calling for complacent speculation, but instead, to the contrary, we proclaim theoretical activity to be the most important part of practice at the historical juncture in which we find ourselves. Because the project of domination is based on the unintelligibility of the world in order to make us voluntarily hand over its management to its leaders, the project of liberation must be exactly the opposite: the world must be rendered comprehensible so that its inhabitants can control it without the need for intermediaries. For this purpose, deeds are not enough; it is words that are needed above all.

The victory of capitalist domination entailed two fundamental changes: the predominance of technology and the emergence of the masses. By technology, we do not mean an agglomeration of machines or practical knowledge that we have the choice to use or not to use. Technology is a medium, an environment, a world that envelops all social activities, from which no one can escape. In short, technology is a total, universal system. And when we use the term masses, a concept invented by the Frankfurt School, we are referring to the majority of the population that has arisen from the dissolution of classes. This dissolution takes place when classes are deprived of their technical environment. Neither change was a matter of ineluctable fate; they are historical products that arose during the 1990s after two decades of crises and revolts.

The military inventions of World War Two revolutionized transport and communications when they were adopted by civilian industry. If technology made big industry, and therefore the proletariat, possible, at a subsequent stage of its development it put an end to both. Automobiles, airplanes, telephones,

household appliances, television, etc., were innovations that profoundly transformed the means of production and everyday life, undermining the stability of the classes. During the 1960s, entire sectors of the working class attained a standard of living that would have been unthinkable in previous eras, and governments assumed full responsibility for a broad range of social services, so that, with the collaboration of the trade unions, a long period of social peace was made possible. The “Welfare” State transformed the legal system, health care, education, communications, transport and leisure into powerful bureaucratic machines. The “scientific organization of labor” was imposed in factories and consumption increased in working class households. The working class developed a tendency towards reformism and immersion in private life, and began to disintegrate. The challenges that were posed by the most important aspects of the integration of the working class into the system led to the rise of resistance and refusal within the proletariat (especially among the youth) and to the emergence of a more profound awareness of the role of machines and deteriorating working conditions; the result was the wave of revolts that took place between 1968 and 1982. The rise in the price of oil during the early 1970s marked the beginning of the crisis that paralyzed industry and plunged millions of people into unemployment. The reaction of the working class was blunted and destroyed. In its struggles it launched new forms of organization (committees, assemblies, coordinadoras, pickets) that were, however, incapable of taking the form of a revolutionary project. Finance capital emerged as the absolute victor. Issues that flourished alongside labor conflicts, such as protest movements in favor of the rights of women, homosexuals and children, the defense of nature, prisoners’ protests, the struggle against racial discrimination, etc., were no longer considered to be specific aspects of the social question and were transformed into the platforms of particular ideologies that were compatible with the system. Financial policies steered the economic recovery of the 1980s onto new foundations: industrial restructuring, the trend towards part-time and temporary jobs, the privatization of government services and the growing predominance of the service sector in the economy. National economies dissolved in a globalized economy thanks to computers and the internet. Technology became the determinant factor in capitalist society, because the source of value was no longer human labor but technological invention and innovation. Technology was the main productive force. Technology was institutionalized and became autonomous and capable of self-perpetuation. The course of development of the dominant order came to depend on technological progress. Social institutions began to base their legitimacy and activities on new (technological) foundations. Due to the fact

that the workers were excluded from the productive process by automation, the contradiction between productive forces and social relations was seemingly abolished. Technology accentuated the international division of labor by means of industrial “relocation”, that is, by dispatching to the periphery of the system, along with whole industries, the class struggle, so that the latter could be mixed up with all kinds of ideological archaisms, nationalisms, indigenous identity movements, racial and religious questions, pre-capitalist traditions, etc. If the complications generated by this division of labor endangered the interests of the ruling classes, then the latter resorted to the military solution, the technological solution par excellence. War is the continuation of politics — and global economics — by strictly technical means. The differences between economics, politics and war are only differences of degree. The situation was no longer characterized by power becoming technological, but by technology becoming power. Technology defined and justified the new dominant interests. The new social relations, and along with them, exploitation, the lack of freedom, suffering, war, etc. were presented as technically necessary facts in a rationalized society. Technical jargon would be used to formulate every question because under technology, now transformed into the ruling power, all problems are technical problems. Nutrition, health, freedom, well-being, culture and desire will from now on be susceptible to technical treatment and must be reconciled with technology to be viable.

The new society, regardless of the political form that it takes, is a fascist totalitarian society. Fascism is nothing but the result of the logic of the technological State of modern society pursued to its extreme conclusions. This fascism of a new type — derived, like the other kind of fascism, from a reaction to contemporary social crisis — is the product of a definitive leap forward in technological development. The technological system is superimposed on class society and absorbs the latter. All of society is then transformed into a laboratory where all kinds of new inventions are tested. At the end of this process, the result is social anomie, that is, the decomposition of classes into masses. Modern fascism is based on this transformation. It is the regime that is based on the mass mobilization of atomized and isolated elements. It cannot survive unless it can permanently mobilize everyone. These masses have been manufactured with the destruction of all sociability, of every form of rank and file power, of all horizontal institutions or means of expression, of the most minimal group solidarity, etc. by way of confinement in private life, incessant movement, emotional discharge and control. All these developments are not so much the work of cunning leaders as they are the outcome of the impersonal logic of the technological system. Technology, by colonizing everyday life and

facilitating the penetration of the cultural commodity, has created a situation where the workers are no longer a world apart, and in which their social behavior has become identical with that of their rulers, so that, although hierarchies still exist, not only the tastes, but also the illnesses typical of executives are now the tastes and illnesses of the workers, too. There are differences with respect to categories, but not with respect to style. Urbanism is an effective means of dispersion and confinement, that is, of massification. The masses live in conurbations, not in cities. Space is subdivided in accordance with vertical criteria: the leaders tend to occupy the centers and the population is transferred to the periphery but well-being is still defined for all as highly-equipped privatization. Every era produces the people that it needs and their fetishes. Our era has continuously produced, everywhere, men and women who are fascinated by technology, men and women who have been raised from the cradle in its world. Their way of thinking is conditioned by the artificial urban environment in which they live. The police are merely a supplemental factor, for thanks to the generalized feeling of impotence generated by isolation, control has been internalized by most people. Neither experience nor arguments will affect the masses and modify their conduct; the work-consumption-escape cycle abolishes real free time and destroys both the capacity to have experiences as well as the capacity to reason. The masses live as prisoners of the present, they have no memory because they do not have either a past or a future. They therefore do not adopt a truly fascist ideology, but are simply incapable of distinguishing between reality and fiction, truth and deception, present and past. They are emancipated from experience and memory. Unlike classes, masses are indifferent, they have neither public life nor political opinions, and they are therefore incapable of formulating common interests or of uniting behind a single objective. They are much more exploitable. Regardless of the political form taken by domination, the mass-individual is only a cog in the social machinery, without a real place in the world, useless, superfluous, replaceable. Totalitarianism cannot exist without this feeling of uselessness, emptiness and uprootedness that dwells in the masses and facilitates their accelerated circulation. Change, fashion, novelty, constant motion, the race to the office, the supermarket, the stadium, the voting booth ... these constitute the soul of fascism. Constant movement causes the masses to be malleable and makes it easier to get them to move in the desired direction. And technology is a dynamic system that modifies and reinvents everything, and forces constant re-adaptations; in a word, it demands movement.

Fascism can adopt democratic ways and allow a certain range of political activity. However, because government and politics have been subjected to

technological imperatives, the traditional differences between democracy and fascism have been erased. Technology is not neutral, but neutralizes all social activity, such as, for example, government and protest. It does not seek participation, but productivity, higher yields, efficiency. On the one side, it is the business of professionals, experts, technicians; on the other side, it is pure triviality and entertainment. In terms of the techniques they utilize, all parties are the same. This does not mean the end of ideologies, but the triumph of one ideology, the ideology of progress, of the spectacle, of technology.

Technological society is a society without a subject, and any attempt to manufacture such a subject by extolling the mass spectacle amounts to fighting on behalf of the dominant fascism. The masses are the object of the new totalitarianism; the “multitude”, the “citizenry”, the “working class” and the “human species” are merely its apologetic carbon copies. The forms of alternative false consciousness, the ideologies of dissent, can be the deliberate products of the servants of domination, but they are often the simple expressions of that inability to distinguish between reality and fiction that is characteristic of the masses, and therefore of their individual atoms. Ideologies are not the crystallization of incomplete thought, or of a badly elaborated critique, but a hodgepodge of diverse themes derived from previous ideologies. Thus, the mass-individual will find no contradiction at all between his everyday conservatism and his particular “utopia”. Nor will he think that there is any major problem involved in passing from one to the other, or in combining two or three such concepts. Ideologies are psychological mechanisms of adaptation. They no longer reflect the aspirations of specific sectors of the population, that is, of classes or fragments of classes, but are the extremely varied efflorescence of mental aberrations that can be produced by the schizophrenia of the masses. As a result, false protest can easily become more and more spectacular, more and more an expression of role-playing. It is above all a matter of escape and “having a good time”. In spite of all appearances to the contrary, there are no fundamental differences between ideological fashions. All of them ignore the temporal conjuncture and therefore history, which is why all of them think it is possible to turn back the clock. The “alter-globalization” movement, for example, advocates a return to the political and economic conditions of the pre-globalization period, the period when economic power was legitimized by social pacts, while it simultaneously accepts the current technological system and the deplorable condition of the masses. While the former position has led its proponents to become the servants of traditional politics, the latter view has established them as defenders of hard-core capitalism pure and simple, and therefore, regardless of their intentions, the closer they get to reality, the more

their activities resemble a circus act and the more vacuous their program becomes. Other phony rebels have advocated even more improbable returns to the past with similar results. Despite the fact that they live only in the present, or perhaps for that very reason, the present instills them with panic. Their common characteristic is the way that all of them shield themselves from reality: their belief in a Golden Age. This dissatisfied sector of the suffering masses thinks that any past time was better. For the civil society movement, this past time is the era of the Nation State, the period of bourgeois democracy tempered in the bureaucracy which they want to reach by riding the wave of technological advances. Technophiles of a workerist bent situate this Golden Age in the Russia of 1918, in the Spain of 1936 or in May '68, a Golden Age which they will attain when the "proletariat" seizes control of the existing means of production. The technophobic minority, which at least does not believe in the self-management of technology, directs its gaze deeper into the past, to the Renaissance, to the rural Middle Ages (contempt for the Court, praise for the village), or to the Paleolithic era (up with hunting and gathering, down with agriculture), as the place where virtue makes its dwelling. In their nostalgic yearning for the past, they believe that history might have existed at one time, but after their respective Golden Ages, there is no longer any history. The present is only a deviation that must be corrected by applying the magic formula contained in their dogmas. They therefore ignore the historic distance that separates us from the past and restrict themselves to awaiting the return of the conditions that once made the Golden Age possible. They do not want to face reality, but instead want to merely worship the ideal image of a defunct reality whose impossible restoration serves them as a moral consolation and as an alibi for their inactivity. Contrary to what is commonly believed, ideology is not the secular religion of the ghetto, for whether it is the ideology of Negri, or virtual internet guerrillas, or primitivists, it does not seek to establish itself in a confined milieu outside of the system, but seeks something much more simple, that is, to choose a particular form of lack of style within the broad range of choices offered by the spectacle of domination. If there is one thing that distinguishes the new totalitarianism it is the fact that those who stand out from the crowd and are appropriately creative make much better citizens than those who are lifelong conformists.

Technological systems are fragile; technical progress reaches a point beyond which it is no longer susceptible to control and we have already passed this point. In fact, many sub-systems no longer function; they have ended up producing effects contrary to the purposes for which they were created; the justice system fomenters crime, the healthcare system fosters illness, the

educational system produces idiots. The system of food production exacerbates world hunger, the production of automobiles swells the number of fatalities in traffic accidents, the “welfare” system results in a higher suicide rate.... Technological society has reached such a degree of development that the more it advances, the greater are the unforeseen effects that it produces and the more irremediable the nature of those effects. Neither experts nor managers know where they are going. Progress entails a greater concentration of personnel and more organizational complexity, increasing the likelihood of errors and breakdowns and amplifying the repercussions of accidents. Attempts to correct these trends have only a minor impact, insofar as the system depends to a growing degree on a constantly increasing number of factors, and are much too late in view of the fact that the system is always functioning at a higher speed. Small slip-ups can have formidable consequences; just one absent-minded oversight could shut down an entire sector. In fact, a single person could bring about the collapse of whole zones of production with relative ease, while the precautions necessary to forestall his mistakes or his sabotage, if this is even possible, require thousands of people. We are constantly having to deal with the destructive efficacy of such malfunctions. The consequences are irreversible: the project to make the world a world of technology therefore results in catastrophe. The technological solution for catastrophe is based on generalized control. Thus, by learning to live with this prospect of catastrophe we are turning this generalized control into the normal social condition, but the process does not stop there. New catastrophes are superimposed on the old ones while social control is tending to develop towards absolute control. In fascist conditions a catastrophe does not trigger any kind of social crisis but instead provides yet another reason for legitimizing the status quo: technology will save us from the evils caused by technology. There is no turning back. Furthermore, as the principal motor force of development, catastrophe becomes the defining characteristic of the economy and politics, so that it ceases to be a misfortune and becomes instead a necessity. All social activity then revolves around the dialectic of destruction and reconstruction. Politics is then redefined as managing the survival of the masses under catastrophic conditions, a circumstance that gives rise to the further development of all kinds of mechanisms of control. In reality, social control takes two forms: the kind of social control that pursues adaptation to extreme environments, and the kind that seeks to contain anti-social conduct. The former is mild and gentle, because domination needs rank and file partners who will cooperate with its managers; these elements constitute the residents of the fish tank that holds the pro-system volunteers such as the environmentalists, the staffs of the NGOs and the

members of the civil society groups. A party of the vanquished who join the side of the victors. The second kind of social control is harsh, it is the business of the police. Its purpose is to detect dissidents, because at a time when technical domination has destroyed the traditional control mechanisms like the family, the educational system and trade unionism, dissidence is dangerous. Police control will always be the best organized and equipped sector of any kind of fascism. Once the point is reached where the system's vulnerability has forced it to mobilize its mechanisms of control, the social function of the State becomes a weighty responsibility for its leaders. Then they set aside their welfare functions in order to devote themselves more seriously to the technological variety of social control par excellence; the complete technological State is a police State. Anyone can be an enemy, and at the extreme point the whole population is a potential enemy. In a totalitarian regime the entire population is under suspicion and therefore all of its movements are under surveillance.

Without a historical subject, the unity of theory and practice, of reality and reason, is impossible. Events do not awaken consciousness, but at most instill resignation, thus tending to lose their significance as the terrain of practice, but never totally. While it is true that there is no revolutionary class, since all that exists now are masses, it is no less certain that minorities still survive amidst the masses, minorities who have not admitted defeat and who believe in the possibility of a revolutionary practice. The radical struggles that do take place, although few and far between, are the manifest proof that not all is lost. Fascism rules in the geographical center, but not one hundred percent. The normalization of catastrophe is not yet automatic. It is a poor foundation but it is the only practical basis for a revolutionary critique. Every aspect of the lives of the masses is the object of exploitation, and in this respect as well the masses are different from classes. For the masses there is no distinction between work and non-work, which is why struggles cannot be circumscribed by the confines of the workplace. Furthermore, struggles that affect the places where people live have a much greater chance of generating consciousness. Thus, the defense of the urban neighborhoods or the territory, insofar as they demand the self-management of areas, of areas as the space of freedom and desire, is more clarifying. In a fascist environment broad movements and huge dissident organizations, such as characterize the Third World countries, are not possible, but on a small scale solidarity and resistance, information and debate, theory and practice, are perfectly plausible. So that within modern totalitarianism a micro-society of dissidents — a veritable ghetto — is feasible, but in a clandestine state, outside of the din of the mass media. It could find support in the larger struggles, but without allowing itself to be mystified by them. This

ghetto has a paradoxically conservative function, since it must rescue the emancipatory and libertarian dream of past struggles from the “uninterrupted noise of all social situations” and preserve it for a time when men and women will “finally be forced to contemplate their real life and mutual relations without illusions” (Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto*). It must be invisible to the eyes of power, and therefore outside of the law, unrecuperable, criminal; only thus can it cast light on the cracks in this system that is constantly undergoing self-destruction and help to make these cracks bigger at the right moment. Nothing is objectively certain; history promises nothing. Resistance might become a subject, or it might become merely a picturesque detail in a panorama of desolation, it all depends on how we play our cards.

Miguel Amorós

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“Sociedad Tecnológica – Sociedad de Masas”

The Rage of the Slums

"How long can this go on?
When are you going to blow it up?
You wanted the war of the worlds and here it is
What do you expect to achieve by setting fires?"

Lyrics of the hip hop group, Nique Ta Mère,
from the 1995 album, "Paris sous les bombes"

At the beginning of the 1980s, when the urban revolts of Brixton (London), Toxteth (Liverpool) and Les Minguettes (Lyon) took place, radical milieus were struck by the sensation of witnessing a final resurgence of the proletarian offensive against class society, which was then well on the way in its transition towards more perfect forms of exploitation and domestication. The Polish workers effectively undermined bureaucratic rule and struggles had only recently broken out in the old continent that pointed directly at the root of the problem, such as the Spanish assembly movement, workers autonomy in Italy, the riots and arson in the North of France or the confrontations between the police and the English miners.

Within the span of five or six years the state had provided irrefutable evidence both of its incompetence, due to its inability to control the capitalist system, and of its impotence, due to its inability to maintain order in the factories and the slums. Direct action made progress. The liquidation of large industrial sectors that were no longer competitive, and the confinement of the unemployed in ghettos located on the peripheries of the major cities, threatened to provoke a greater crisis than the one that the state was trying to ameliorate. The proletariat emerged from its suicidal passivity and refused to allow itself to be led like cattle to the slaughter. So much hatred reigned in its ranks that the smallest spark triggered explosions of violence, which were unfortunately local and isolated. The radicals were hoping that this working class rage would spread enough to obstruct the mechanisms of repression and permit direct communication among the pariahs of the earth, without the mediation of leaders. "When the workers speak to one another, the state dissolves." The slum revolts were to confirm this transformation of everyday despair into a vivid hatred. The inhabitants of the outlying suburbs (the impoverished working class) did not accept the destiny to which it was

condemned by capitalist exploitation and violently rejected both work as well as the miserable life upon which it was based. The collective violence of the slums showed all the proletarians the road to follow to escape from the dynamic of production-consumption. They could not bring themselves to beg for the right to work and to a place to live by presenting as desirable what for many of them was already unbearable, but to satisfy the will to live fully they had to confront the system head-on, proceeding methodically. Firebombs and baseball bats had to make way for critical discussion, the rejection of all mediation, and anti-hierarchical association. We know how all that ended. Through a mixture of repression, drugs and trade unionism, the first victories were not capitalized upon, many opportunities were allowed to pass by, steps in the wrong direction were taken, stagnation set in, etc., and we are paying today for the consequences of those errors and failures. Those who fought on these fronts became more impoverished as far as communicable experience is concerned. They proved to be defenseless on a terrain that within a few years became unrecognizable. The closing of industrial plants condemned a large number of workers to a precarious existence. They soon found themselves without jobs and without resources. But the new poverty was much more than just material poverty: life was constantly being digitalized and submission to the most insignificant economic or technological imperatives was the norm. The impoverishment of experience, both private and public, was the main result of this development, and the one that defined a new condition of barbarism. I have called the society in which this condition prevails, mass society.

The rupture between two eras was brutal and absolute. Who would dare under these conditions to address rebel youth in terms of the experience of the era of classes? The working class community has disintegrated and the rule of the new oligarchies over mass society is very different from the previous rule of the bourgeoisie over the proletariat. The unemployed are not utilized as a “reserve army” to put pressure on wages, but as a threat to “security”, that is, as a public enemy, in order to obtain the absolute submission of that part of the population that is still integrated in the market. The unemployed no longer constitute an element within the market but are permanently excluded and condemned to material and moral degradation, precisely because it is not their poverty that the system seeks to exploit, but the image of their poverty. The worse that image is, the better. The spectacle assumed responsibility for criminalizing them, first identifying the slums with violence, and then, later, with both immigration and fundamentalism. It is clear that the slum was the laboratory for spectacular domination where the social management of the future was tested. There, political experiments were carried out *in vivo* that were

later applied to all domains of society, when all of society had been transformed into a slum. The R.G. (French national police intelligence service) [*Direction Centrale des Renseignements Généraux* or Central Directorate of General Intelligence—Tr. Note] had already created in 1991, due to the revolts in Vaulx-en-Velin (Lyon) and Sartrouville (Paris), a Section for “cities and suburbs” which was at first called the “urban violence” Section. With all the difficulties entailed by the management of a society that is being undermined and besieged by every kind of real catastrophe, while the cities were being evacuated in order to provide accommodations only to tourists and elites, and at the same time that the cities were spreading throughout the countryside and transforming the latter into suburbs, the spectacle helped to unleash and propagate their “violence”.

The revolt of October 27 was an experiment of this kind, having originated in a public relations exercise on the part of the Minister of the Interior, Sarkozy, with an eye to the presidential elections. It was not the deaths of two boys who were being chased by the police when they were burned alive in a transformer that triggered the revolt, but rather the media coverage of this event. The police had claimed that one hundred arson fires each day was normal for the country and the first days witnessed the burning of far fewer cars than that, but the event was magnified. All the emphasis that immediately followed, with Sarkozy’s fascist threats, only made sense as a provocation: he played with fire because he wanted fire. The media caused and provided further encouragement for the incidents. “We like to see ourselves on television, it makes us feel proud”, an arsonist would say. And starting a fire is the best way to appear on the daily TV news. In fact, there was a competition between young people mesmerized by television: “when we see what they are doing in the other neighborhoods, we want to do better”. “We have understood that this is how we can get them to pay attention to us”, others would say, and they would add: “With three nights of rioting we have obtained results; we got on television and they are going to distribute pasta in our neighborhood”. The anger of the youth ultimately was good for something, finding flammable material in two hundred more cities, even in rural areas, and providing the planet with the pleasing image of a country in flames. One cannot blame the protagonists for not following the script to the letter. The victim in the end was the Government, which did not succeed in criminalizing them. Neither organized criminals, nor foreigners, nor even all those of North African or Sub-Saharan origin. Just despised young French people, without a present or a future in the system, persecuted by the same people who marginalized them. Neither drug dealers nor religious fundamentalists had anything to do with it. Furthermore, in the

neighborhoods where the mafias or the Islamists exercised a certain amount of control, there were no fires. It was necessary to retract certain claims. The president of the Republic himself, challenging the government, pointed to “the poison of discrimination” as the cause of the riots. And, as Sarkozy’s proclamation of “zero tolerance” implied, the government wanted to direct the attention of the panic stricken, domesticated French population towards the zones of deprivation, not of course to put an end to marginalization, but to throw the young people who survived in those zones into prison, along the lines of the Penal State. The spectacle was dealt a setback, however. The rule of order was scandalously thrown into turmoil for more than three weeks by a handful of adolescents. What would have happened if all the inhabitants of the slums had participated in the revolt? One of the “most powerful states in the world” was subjected to ridicule and social disintegration became visible along with its causes: exclusion, racism, penal urbanism, police control. The government had to resort to proclaiming a curfew under a law passed during the era of the Algerian war, a law whose provisions were not even implemented in May ’68. The Interior Ministry spokesperson Copé blamed the foreign press for having disseminated the truth, that is, the image of a civil war in France, and warned that, “no country is immune from situations like this, we have seen it in the past and, unfortunately, we could see it again in the future”. The extension of this state of emergency for three months helped dispel any remaining doubts concerning this kind of civil war, with a total of 3,000 arrested and 600 imprisoned, many of whom were sentenced in expedited trials to up to four years in prison. On the one hand, the government extended the state of emergency, while on the other hand it decided that a stage of social assistance was necessary before the establishment of a police state, so it is going to hire 20,000 young people on short-term labor contracts, mostly in the cities. “Voluntary civil service”, “social work”, religion and the “fabric of solidarity” were openly discussed as means of control. The fiasco of police state methods led to the recognition of the need for mediators in order to break up the cohesiveness of the revolt and to deactivate its mechanisms. And if they could not find such mediators they would follow the advice of the sordid Jean Daniel: “create elites artificially”.

The real crime of the revolt was to have revealed the woeful condition of contemporary French society. For their part the young arsonists did not provide many clues about what they wanted but instead indicated exactly what they did not want. They did not want the slums; not the one they lived in or any other. That is why they were destroying them. They did not have any respect for cars, or for journalists, or for firemen, or for McDonalds, or for police stations, or

shopping centers that they did not even bother to loot; nor did they want schools, or libraries, or gymnasiums, or welfare offices—so just what did they want? When they did blurt out something like a demand, such as, for example, for Sarkozy's resignation, decent jobs, justice, etc., they were only repeating the clichés that they had learned from the teachers in their schools. Not even rap lyrics expressed any clear demand. The concerns of the latter were quite topical. Hatred of the police, the desire to be treated with respect, designer label clothing and not much more. You cannot even call that a language. They spend all their time confusing reality and fiction just like all the other young people: "during the day we sleep, we see our girlfriends, we play with our Playstations ... and at night, we go out to have some fun; at nine we go to make war on the police—we are in the Matrix!" But by some ruse of History, this time fiction does not help to escape from reality but instead helps to cheerfully put up with it. After video games, the flames. Their lack of experience obliges them to start all over again, without the inspiration of anything real, and make a clean slate of everything. This is why they are hardly capable of explaining their actions. They do not follow directives, they are not organized, they do not issue declarations. They make no demands, they make no proposals, they do not enter into dialogue. They only set fires. With these acts of arson they point out that the road to the only solution proceeds via the destruction of the entire oppressive environment. And by remaining totally negative, they prevent the revolt from being used by recuperators. But they also prevent it from ever being anything but that: negation, violence. And violence is not necessarily radicalism. Today, destruction and subversion do not travel on the same road. For now, violence is the only way those who do not count and have nothing to lose can express themselves: "we only know how to talk with fire", "we have no choice"; it is a way of feeling good: "Damn it, I breath when I burn", and even a way to just hang out: "I have nothing to do all day long." However, violence, too, and this is its weak point, is a way of achieving something positive, that is, to achieve recognition and attention. For what purpose? To "reestablish civic and republican values among the most disadvantaged classes", so they can be returned to the fold.

The nihilist rage of the slums is a reflection of the nihilism of the dominant system. The angry youths have merely served as a mirror for its irresponsibility and its unconsciousness by illuminating all at once the terrible truth of a cruel and absurd era; all the people of France saw it and were scared shitless. So the only really French passion that survives in our neighboring country is just that, fear; and it is also the only surviving passion in all modern countries, but in France it reaches truly pathological levels. The sudden rise to popularity of

Sarkozy, that hysterical politician who speaks “the same language as the French”, is enough to prove this, as if any more were needed. The rage of the slums is the rage of Reason, but it does not know this. The arsonists are starting from scratch, alone, without anyone’s help, neither on the terrain of solidarity or on that of ideas. They will have to leave in their wake more than just smoldering ashes if they want to give shape to that project that is perfectly characterized in the rap slogan, “Nique la France!” (Fuck France!). An incitement that, slightly altered, should be put into practice by all rebels in their respective countries.

Miguel Amorós, November 2005.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“La cólera del suburbio”

The Last Twenty Years of Social Liquidation

*Concerning the Degeneration of Revolutionary Ideals
after the End of the Working Class in the West*

“The present period is one of those when everything that seems normally to constitute a reason for living dwindles away, when one must, on pain of sinking into confusion or apathy, call everything into question again.”

Simone Weil, *Oppression and Liberty*.

On July 19, 1936 the Spanish proletariat responded to Franco's coup d'état by unleashing a social revolution. On February 23, 1981 another coup d'état took place, one that met with the most absolute indifference of the proletarians, who hardly bothered to change the station on their radios or TVs. This contrast of attitudes reflects the fact that the proletariat was in 1936 the principal social factor in politics, while in 1981 it was not even an auxiliary factor for the interests of others. If the coup of 1936 was directed against the proletariat, the coup of 1981 was a settling of accounts between different factions of power. Not even in the most alarmist analyses was the workers' predilection for struggle taken into consideration for the simple reason that it was minimal. The perpetrators of the coup d'état ignored the proletariat because it was no more than a secondary figure of political rhetoric, one that was historically finished.

During the years of the “economic transition” to the new conditions of world capitalism — the 1980s — the working class was breaking into fragments and resisting, on a local scale, its “reconversion” into a subaltern class, until the highly publicized strike of December 14, 1988, which marked its liquidation as a class. From then on it would never again express its interests independently or autonomously. The anti-nuclear and local movements had reached their peaks five years earlier. During this period the rupture between the adult workers, securely situated in the factories, and the young workers, with no prospects of secure employment, was consummated, which led to the first assemblies of the unemployed. This fracture led to the radical critique of wage labor, which was on its last legs, or, which amounts to the same thing, to the rejection of work as a human activity. This was an authentic rupture, since up until that time the

conduct of the workers was based on a certain kind of work ethic. More or less by this time a youth milieu had developed outside the world of work, a milieu that whose concerns revolved around squatting, repression, counter-information, ecology, anti-militarism, feminism, etc., which received a powerful impulse from the youth movements of 1986-1987. After the definitive subordination of the workers to the new economic and political conditions of capital, the social center of gravity shifted from the factories to the spaces where young people associated with one another. In this environment and amidst the definite decline of workerist ideologies the social question lost its unitary character and dissolved, and its fragments were addressed as separate problems. The young rebels did not have a tradition of social struggles behind them, nor could they embrace a concrete Marxist or anarchist ideology, and beyond a vague anti-authoritarianism they did not know what to do with the set of experiences that the working class had bequeathed to them; they were the unwilling heirs of historical tasks that they could not assume given the shallowness of their critique, the instability of their supporters and the parochial nature of their environment. All their efforts to coordinate their activities, stimulate discussions and create links with urban struggles came up against the same problems: dispersion, the absence of thought, minimal levels of engagement, the lack of reference points, self-imposed isolation.... Because these problems were not resolved, the real struggles unraveled and the youth milieu stagnated and throughout its expanse a lack of definition, poseurs, street fights and alternative lifestyles became predominant. It was revealed as a transitional medium for an integrated adult life, like the university or the occupational training center. The word revolution ceased to have any precise meaning. The attempts that were made between 1989 and 1998 to overcome this theoretical impasse were purely organizational and formal, based on media campaigns and meetings, which is why over the long run they resulted in failure. Thus ended what was known as "a space of autonomy".

To reconstitute a unitary critical view of the world and to bestow content on the revolutionary project it is necessary to engage in profound reflection on the achievements and the failures of past struggles, not to mention the surprising changes undergone by capitalism, but even before analyzing all these things, we have to carry out a pitiless critique of the whole environment of the struggles themselves, its inconsistencies, its frivolity and its lack of intellectual courage, in order to purify it of both its sentimental bourgeois traits as well as its militant clichés and practices. This was not done, or it was not done effectively, and the milieu deteriorated, merging with the postmodern left and third world nationalism, and with those who tried to reconstruct as quickly as possible a

new “civil” social space, the terrain of civic platforms and neighborhood associations, abandoned by the parties and trade unions which became embedded in the apparatus of domination. The demonstrations against the Gulf War and against NATO, the campaigns for the 0.7%, for the guaranteed minimum income and for the Zapatistas, were the first tricks of this project of integration into institutional politics that crystallized in 1997 in the “civil society movement”. New “platforms” were created, “spaces” were liberated, “collectives” and “networks” were formed which convened “forums” that rediscovered the charms of minority trade unionism, nationalism, NGOs, and state subsidies and institutions. The new technologies provided the minimum structure to uphold the outward appearances of a movement, which, without any transitional stage, passed from the local to the international scale. The youth ghetto was rapidly inundated by the ludic pathology of concerts, raves, marches, summer festivals, etc., only to go to die in the movements against the summits and against the war, veritable general states of confusion and recuperation which, after Genoa, became the fifth wheel of the electoral bandwagon of social democracy. The internet had created among the masses of the youth the illusion of a world community possessed of a project for social change, while anti-globalization tourism produced the chimera of an anti-capitalist movement. But what telecommunications facilitated was a virtual, and consequently unreal, space, the receptacle for the frustration and spiritual poverty of thousands of persons, so that the abundant social base upon which a cause could be erected remained trapped in the networks of non-existence. And while the spectacle of a movement was generalized, the still-existing lines of communication were irremediably damaged, as is demonstrated by the disappearance of magazines, the closing of social centers, bookstores and publishers, the decline of assemblies, the degeneration of language, the evaporation of social commitment, etc.

Technology as a global system, as a means that embraces all social activity, has had its greatest impact on the youth, the sector of the population that is most susceptible to the appeal of new gadgets. The youth, since 1995, have been more the offspring of the new technologies than of their parents. These technologies constitute their second nature in which they feel most comfortable, and which they see not as the cause of their moral poverty but as the basis of their freedom. They think the same way they live; since their way of life is imposed upon them, however, their way of thought is not free: it is capitalism that puts the computer on the table and which parks the car in front of the house. As brand-new consumers they have become the vanguard of the spectacle. For the first time ever, and thanks to the communication

technologies, the youth erupt as masses, contributing to the spectacle of action the psychological traits of adolescence, that is, the cult of the present, the rejection of effort and experience, narcissism, the quest for immediate satisfaction, the confusion between private experience and public life, between the serious and the playful, etc. Far from feeling sympathetic to the struggle against technologically equipped social oppression, what they really feel is an immense need for entertainment. Profoundly depoliticized, they pour in their masses into the streets to have some fun while wearing their Palestinian scarves, parading their false concern for others and proclaiming their ephemeral commitment. In the society of the spectacle protest is a form of leisure and the tragic pathos of the class struggle must recede before hilarity, relaxation and festival, genuine forms of the neo-contestatory spirit which has found in pot and pan-banging, whistles, and costume parades its most suitable means of expression and in software, blogs and cell-phones its best weapons.

Technology is not neutral; it is inseparable from oppression, it has no other purpose. All technological progress under capitalism is progress in oppression, but no one seems to have understood this. To the contrary, the computer screens are filled with apologetic thinkers and retail merchants of the new technological capitalism ready to follow well-worn paths, whose thoughts run in the innocuous channels of false consciousness. Ideologies of submission to the imperatives of the new leaders of the world economy like Negrism, Castoriadism, ecologism, or the trademark products of IPES and ATTAC, circulate in order to undermine basic intellectual conquests, to throw overboard all the theoretical baggage of struggle, and in general, to extirpate historical memory. As an ideological alibi, a replacement for the proletariat has been sought in the defenseless and amorphous beings defined as the multitude, social movements, the citizenry, civil society or simply "the people". The new historical subject is pure fiction since the real one was liquidated by capitalism, but its fictitious image is necessary because the spectacle of social conflict requires a phantom; its legitimacy cannot be based on a real class but only on an invented one. An imaginary class was posted on the terrain of the spectacle, since it is neither a class, nor is its struggle really a struggle.

By opting for a false protest manufactured out of thin air, the new ideologies actually put their faith in PRISA and social democracy (and they know this is true). They do not want to confront anything; they do not aspire to change the world but to participate in its management. For them, another capitalist management was possible. The social forums and the anti-summit demonstrations were the bridges of their dialogue with power. Their language merges into a panegyric to order: with the right verbal formulas the lead of

triviality — voting, sending letters to political representatives, surfing the web, crowding together like cattle — was transmuted into the gold of historical lucidity and heroism. This ludicrous discourse merely served to camouflage an indecent attitude of collaboration, which is why, insofar as they defined a politics that was “from the bottom to the left”, it was the same old politics as always. In reality, what they told us was that a kinder and gentler way to totalitarianism was possible, and this other way to totalitarianism required a different kind of bureaucracy, one that would act as mediator between the ruling class and the masses. However, sitting on the masses is like sitting on your finger. They are not, nor can they ever be, a political subject ready to follow the first Pied Piper of Hamelin that comes along. The masses do not want to participate in politics, they want to be the object of politics; they do not want to change society, all they want is someone to take care of them. This is why they are masses and obey power without the need for any specialized guides.

The effects of capitalist globalization — the transformation of the classes into masses, the invasion of everyday life by electronic appliances and the juvenilization of protest — have transformed the real world into something unintelligible. Not only the resigned, but the rebels, too, were thrust into unexplored and strange mental spaces, where the ideas of the past do not apply. The collapse of the old ideologies provoked disturbing sensations of uncertainty and powerlessness, inspiring hostility and refusal. The eternity of the class struggle was an untouchable taboo for the orthodoxy of continuity; the existence of a class that was the bearer of emancipatory ideals was beyond all doubt, for if the concept were to be dispensed with the theoretical edifice sustained by it would collapse. But since facts were stubborn, the working class as a class capable of apprehending the totality of social phenomena, and thus capable of organizing society in accordance with its desires, would vanish and exist only in the shared realm of workerist verborrhea, in a dogma of consolation. Social agitation that remained within these positions became disconnected from reality, deteriorated and marginal, giving rise to innocent social gatherings or fundamentalist sects. The alternative to the faith, in view of the absence of a critique of postmodern recuperation, and without the reestablishment of a historical perspective of social struggles, had to be another faith. Thus the new remedies for sectarianism will necessarily have to be sectarian. There were truly comical attempts to restore the Leninist ideology, voluntarists dropping anchor in anarchosyndicalism and suspicious stand-ins for situationism and naturism, now called primitivism. By way of a ruse of domination, the memory of the distant past is used to obscure the recent past and mystify the present. For both the orthodox as well as the innovators, the

only task was to introduce bits of reality into their ideological kennels, in such a way as to render possible comforting and tranquilizing convictions, a flight backwards that found its expression in two equally senseless alternatives: the “pluralistic” postmodernity and technophilia of the new ideology, and the contemplative fossilization of the old ideology.

Faced with such paralyzing or conformist ideologies, sincere rebels reacted by making a leap forward into activism. They declared their support for immediate confrontation with the system and generally disregarded the contradictions that obscured and prevented the reformulation of the social question, proclaiming the superiority of practical action over reflection and reducing the latter to a secondary activity. Disconnected from the radical aspirations of the past, they did not know what they wanted, but were very clear about what they did not want. They did not want capitalism and mistrusted the ideologies that served the bureaucrats. Without intending to do so, as a result of their nihilism they reduced the social question to a matter of propaganda, which was simplified in the form of analyses, formulas, and slogans of the “insurrectionalist theses” variety. They fell into a pragmatism of another kind that entailed an impoverishment of critique and thus of action itself. Disdain for thought is also disdain for strategy. Action had a tendency to privilege one of its moments, confrontation, and forgot about the others. It appeared as an immediate response that was independent of time, place and circumstances; isolated, minoritarian and violent. In this way action became an end in itself, one that was more in need of technique than of ideals. And it did not attempt to create arenas for the conquest of a terrain where the oppressed could exercise freedom, but instead attempted to be an exemplary act that could inspire admiration and emulation. The extent of destruction achieved was the measure of its quality, since the fetishism of action brought about the mystification of violence and identified the latter with radicalism, often confusing domination with repression and overestimating the role of the police. This state of activist excitement was born after a profound generational rupture that prevented the communication of the memory of revolutionary events of the recent past; thus, the young anti-authoritarians started from zero and their errors were the fruit of the cowardice and betrayal of others. Just as we have criticized the weak points of their conduct, we shall also acknowledge their generosity and bravery, and their willingness to take risks, which like a breath of fresh air cleared the social scene of ideological complacency. Finally, along the hard road that they have chosen to travel, many of them have found the ideas they needed. They deserve our respect, especially those who were victimized by repression. Their prisoners are our prisoners.

Among the activist milieus, the false opposition between theory and practice is expressed by the juxtaposition of mass organization and informal group. Previously, organization had always meant power; informal contacts were not rejected but acknowledged as complementary to the organization: class sociability, the networks of mutual aid and solidarity, friendship, devotion ... all contributed to the strength of the organization at the same time that they prevented it from degenerating into a bureaucracy. Today it is obvious that informal structures are the only possible form of organization because the informal basis that constitutes the foundations of more coordinated forms has been destroyed by the enemy, and above all because the radicalize youth milieu is tremendously informal, that is, very inconsistent. The enormous difficulty faced by those individuals who initiate transparent relations and commit themselves to the cause of freedom obliges them to be very flexible with regard to organizational questions, but this is not an achievement, but rather a condition imposed by the deterioration of people and struggles. It is a tactic that emerges from the lack of lasting commitment and the low levels of responsibility. The levels of organization are subordinated to the development of class consciousness and this depends on social struggles. Informal structures prevail when there is no clearly distinguished class in action, when forces are weak and dispersed and the degree of self-discipline is minimal. Organization is therefore a process that responds to the generalization and radicalization of struggles, both of which are necessary for the appearance of significant revolutionary projects. Informality, however, does not confer immunity from bureaucracy; bureaucracy is quite capable of operating informally. Nor is it a remedy against infiltration; provocateurs know how to behave in informal environments as well as in the other kinds. It is another kind of factor that really matters: experience, human quality, intelligence... Of course, one thing cannot be managed informally, and that is going on the offensive; unfortunately, however, we are far from being able to allow ourselves anything of that kind.

Over the course of the last twenty years, the youth milieu has not been capable of compensating for the disappearance of the workers milieu, and has in turn deteriorated due to the spectacle. This is why the *ateneos* and social centers have not even been capable of being as useful to the exploited as the trade union centers were in times past. Despite all their efforts, they have not managed to become centers for training and the dissemination of ideas, which gives rise to an air of frustration among their regular volunteers and supporters that cannot be dissimulated. What usually happens is that they learn Linux or vegan cooking in these social centers, instead of studying social history or practices of resistance against capitalism. They are not loved by the established order, but if

we recall how often the trade unions were shut down in the past, it is scandalous to see just how much these social centers are tolerated, that is, just how inoffensive they are. There are very honorable exceptions with a high degree of social commitment, but even they have had to make concessions to youth culture and have had to make accommodations with their tee shirts, teenage punk rock, “performances” or computer technology. Like the old sports clubs or neighborhood associations, they have been absorbed by the dynamic of survival in a hostile environment. The logistics of knowing how to live and the pedagogy of revolt are functions that have eluded them; from a subversive point of view, no one comes out of them worse than when they went in, and this should be a matter of concern to their supporters. The solution will in part consist in a critical reappraisal of their activity that must have no other goal than that of upholding a high level of social consciousness in conditions that we know are extremely unfavorable. They will have to distill the best from historical experience, rehabilitating the traditions of the oppressed and being inspired by them. Not by making concessions to fashions, not by submitting to stereotypes, not by falling into the rut of good vibes; in short, to go straight to the root of things. However, only those can proceed along a straight line towards the root who know how to recognize this root and the knowledge that is not attached to any particular stage of life. Just as certainly as there are young people who are more repulsive than the elderly and old people who are ageless.

Miguel Amorós.

Transcript of lectures delivered at the Sahiri Bookstore in Valencia, March 11, 2006,
and at the Atreu! social center in La Coruña, April 10, 2006,
presenting the book, *Golpes y Contragolpes*.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“Los veinte últimos años de liquidación social
Sobre la degeneración de los ideales revolucionarios
ante el fin de la clase obrera en occidente”

The Whole World is Like a Nowhere Land Called Alicante

In June 2015, a coalition of socialists, civil society activists and post-Stalinists gained control over the municipal government of Alicante. In its electoral campaign it called for the participation of the citizenry, a commitment to the well-being of the unemployed and people “at risk of exclusion”, the eradication of outrageous misconduct in local government administration, the universal right to housing, the struggle against climate change, the defense of the Valencian cultural heritage, and, finally, a new model of the city, a city that is democratic, egalitarian, sustainable and based on solidarity. Basically, the cliché campaign promises of the kind have become the *modus vivendi* of “left-wing” politics. In general, the measures implemented to promote these goals have been neither more effective nor more bold than those taken with ostensibly similar intentions in mind by previous electoral coalitions, and corruption and cronyism have not even had to keep a low profile, although they are not conducted on the same scale as in the past. Meanwhile, an attempt is underway to expand the local garbage dump, open up more land to industrial development, publicize the trademark name, “Alicante: City of Rice”, and promote tourism related to conventions and other special events. For the peace of mind of the real estate speculators who own land suitable for urban development, the municipal government is not considering the restoration of a vanished agriculture, much less does it harbor any intentions of helping to establish a significant parallel economy that could function based on renewable energy and alternative social currencies. At most, a bicycle lane and an “alternative” festival. This is, of course, not at all consistent with the energy and environmental sustainability to which it aspires. The participation of the citizenry, meanwhile, has proceeded in an atmosphere of confrontation with neighborhood representatives and vetoes of the decisions of the neighborhood associations of three districts (Florida, Gran Vía Sur and PAU 2). Nor was the municipalization of public services welcomed with open arms by a “triple alliance”¹⁰ that has exploited those same services for two years, so that this policy has fallen victim to

¹⁰ “Triple Alliance”: in Spanish, the “*Tripartito*”, an electoral alliance of the PSPV-PSOE (Socialists), Guanyar Alacant (local left-wing coalition) and Compromís per Alacant (Valencian nationalists) [translator’s note].

mediocrity, incompetence, the election of charismatic non-entities [fulanismo]¹¹, and squabbles over positions in the administrative machinery.

The interests that really call the shots in the Alicante metropolitan region are still the same as before and the degree of independence that the local administration can exercise for the furtherance of its own policies is minimal. This is why left-wing municipal administration looks so much like right-wing municipal administration. These decisive interests are basically invested in retail trade, tourism and the construction industry, and this is why the unemployment rate exceeds 20% (50% in the Zona Norte), wages are low, most jobs are temporary jobs, and poverty affects more than 40% of the active population. As a “sun and sand” destination, it is the province that receives the most aid from the central government, and is third, behind only Madrid and Barcelona, in the volume of real estate transactions. It is also home to the third largest number of registered vehicles, whose sales figures have only continued to surge since 2013. There are now almost more cars than people in Alicante. New shopping centers are being constructed (Mercadona, Aldi, Consum), old commercial districts are being renovated (Puerta de Alicante), and big companies like Ikea are being courted very attentively: industrial food and furniture are realities as generalized as motor vehicles (3 out of every 5 residents of Alicante consider the private automobile to be indispensable). The average price of residential real estate has been rising for three years and is now approximately 1,500 euros per square meter, within the budget of people with lots of money, but the bank possesses thousands of vacant flats, and the municipal council, despite its promises to do so, has not dared to pressure it to lease these flats to the municipality for social use. The language question deserves its own separate treatment. Optimistically, one might assert that one-fourth of the population of Alicante can speak Valencian, but few write in the vernacular. Its use does not appear to be spreading. To the contrary, neutral attitudes and even hostility to the Valencian language have been on the rise, even among municipal officials. Soon, it will be nothing but a cultural relic, at least in the metropolitan region. Alicantians are not exactly overworking

¹¹ In Spanish, *fulano* is a deprecatory term that means “nobody” or “anybody”; the neologism *fulanismo*, which appears to have been first popularized by Miguel de Unamuno in 1903, has come to mean support for a political candidate or other public figure, for example, that does not result from agreement with his or her policies or doctrines, but from an identification with the candidate’s image or name, or a blind hope that he or she will be a savior; the candidate might as well be just anybody because no real doctrinal commitment or understanding is needed to become a fictional entity fabricated according to the specifications of the advertising industry. The fact that there is no corresponding term in English is itself revealing of the shallowness and vapidness of politics in the English-speaking countries, where this phenomenon has been taken for granted for so long that no special word for it has been coined [translator’s note].

themselves by reading Castilian, either. Their literary illiteracy is striking, a universal feature in the major cities. Nothing to write home about in a city that can take pride in the fact that it has destroyed almost all of its architectural, historical and artistic patrimony.

The Alicantian model does not have a very good track record with regard to marital relations, either: it ranks second among the provinces of Spain in the number of cases of domestic violence (more than 9,000 reported incidents per year) and also has the second-highest divorce rate (3 divorces for every 1,000 residents)¹². Despite its benign climate, Mediterranean sociability, festivals and an impressive leisure services industry, the people of Alicante are no happier than people anywhere else. Nor are they more authoritarian, or more infantilized, or more self-centered, but they are more uprooted, and the degree of decomposition of their personalities is disturbing. Concerning their political class we may paraphrase Chesterton, and say that not having ideals does not make one less of an idiot¹³. To give just one example: the appalling spectacle of the aborted initiative to change forty-seven street names bestowed by the Franco regime. It is a city in an advanced capitalist regime, but with respect to mental health care it is a third-world city. There are almost 70,000 mentally ill persons in the metropolitan area, to which must be added several thousands more if we count the addiction-related behavioral disorders that require treatment; no surprise there, but what is scandalous in this case is the almost total absence of means to treat the disorders, to hospitalize the ill, to follow up on their treatment, to re-insert them into normal life and to provide them with dignity. It is the worst place to be depressed. And there are not, nor is there any intention of creating, any truly public places, that is, places for encounters, for discussions, for the ongoing dialogue of the residents. Yes, La Muntanyeta complies with some of these requirements, but they are only used occasionally. Thus, the city model has not changed one bit under the new municipal government: it is increasingly more diffuse, grey, disconnected, gentrified, hierarchical, class dominated.... It is, however, the perfect city for going shopping, for going to the beach or having a few drinks.

The city of Alicante, Madrid's beach and the Mecca of all retirees with enough money to go there, is hostile towards excluded elements, pro-Madrid

¹² This figure is based on the "crude divorce rate", which includes children and other non-marriageable elements in its denominator: although it does not seem very impressive at first glance, it is actually higher than the crude divorce rate for all Western European countries and is only slightly lower than the corresponding ratio for the United States (3.2 per thousand) [translator's note, based on data reproduced by Wikipedia from various years between 2001 and 2016 for a selection of countries, mostly in Europe].

¹³ The original phrase attributed to Chesterton appears to be something to the effect of, "Not believing in God does not make us less idiotic", but I was unable to locate the exact quotation [translator's note].

[españolista], maintains bad relations with its own residents, is by no means “eviction-free”, and fosters shallow, self-centered, bovine and socio-pathological behaviors; it is ecologically unsustainable, out of equilibrium with the surrounding territory (twelve million arrivals at El Altet [airport] every year), and is defiling the environment (the dump at Fontcalent, for example, does not recycle materials nor does it incinerate organic residues). Finally, in view of the fact that the participation of the citizenry in their local government is reduced to voting once every four years—almost 40% of the eligible voters abstain—there could hardly be anything less democratic. And those who now govern will continue to govern until the voluntary servitude of the governed ceases. As long as civil society does not break with the city-supermarket; as long as it does not set in motion a process of socialization and self-organization; as long as the neighborhood assemblies do not express their opinions, formulate their demands and elect revocable committees to administer the *res publica*, there will never be any democracy. The text that follows may be a positive contribution in favor of this change, keeping in mind that it was written in 2006.

Miguel Amorós, January 14, 2017.

The Destruction of Alicante

During the last fifteen years the peninsula has undergone a brutal process of urbanization that seems to have no end in sight, whose origin must be sought in changes induced by capitalist globalization. Countries that were incapable of basing their economic growth on technological innovation, on an abundance of cheap energy or low wage levels, were forced to exploit their only resource, the territory. Unbridled urbanism is the instrument their leaders employed to convert the destruction of the territory into the accumulation of capital. The cities, fragmented and barely habitable, have spread the contagion of dehumanization to the rural areas and to nature, completely subjecting the territory to the exclusive, trivializing plans of the commodity.

The map of the world is being increasingly dominated by the construction industry. This is particularly true of Spain, where it is the driving force of the economy. In 2005, more credit was advanced to the construction industry than to the industrial sector; only eight years before, the industrial sector received three times as much credit as the construction industry. The surface area of the country subjected to paving and construction has increased by 40% between 1987 and 2005, much higher than the rate of population growth during the same period. During the last five years, 2,630,000 homes have been built in Spain, 800,000 of which were built in 2005 alone: there is one house for every

two Spaniards. Spain builds more than any other European country. It has the largest real estate market in Europe, which does not mean that it is the country with the most affordable housing; quite the contrary, mortgage indebtedness has broken records and families now devote 41% of their net annual income to paying for a roof over their heads. A large part of the population does not own the little cubbyholes they occupy, and young people and other wage workers who rely on temporary or casual jobs cannot afford to own a residence. The construction costs of government-subsidized housing are ridiculously low, but even these units are not affordable for most people. Instead, two million houses remain vacant year-round and twice as many are used only intermittently as second or third homes. Today, a house is an investment, mere capital, the object of a global real estate market. In 2003, between 800,000 and 1,700,000 families made inquiries about buying houses on the peninsula, and the Spanish real estate market is now the leading European market for second homes.

Half of the houses sold in the recent past are located on the Mediterranean coast; between 1995 and 2005, their sales prices almost tripled. The shoreline is where most of the construction is taking place and the convergence of interests known officially as the “Valencian Community”¹⁴ is the most paradigmatic case of the power of the “builders”. Overall, the urbanized surface area grew by 52% during the last decade, significantly more than in the rest of the country, while the urban core areas themselves only grew by 11%, which indicates a diffuse, disconnected urbanization, implemented at the expense of lands robbed of their agriculture, woodlands, scrublands, swamps and marshes. In many localities this new kind of urbanization accounts for more new residences than the downtown districts and practically every city is currently in the grips of a similar dynamic. The relative influence of the “Community” in the Spanish state as a whole has increased in terms of stock market valuation, jobs and demography, based for the most part on tourism and construction, and everything indicates that the future will be based on the same foundations. During the last fifteen months, the Consell de la Generalitat has given the green light to a thousand Integrated Action Programs [Programas de Actuación Integrada — specific local development programs] (PAIs), the offspring of the very close relations between the construction companies and local institutions. It is therefore not surprising that the construction industry is responsible for 42% of income in the municipalities. Because the construction industry is almost the only source of financing and economic revitalization (and also the primary cause of political corruption), the municipalities have approved plans for the next few years that involve the

¹⁴ The official name of the autonomous region of Valencia in Spain [translator’s note].

construction of 700,000 homes, with all the accompanying infrastructure, roads, high-voltage power lines, incinerators, shopping centers, leisure and entertainment districts, sports stadiums, golf courses, etc. As a result, the population is expected to increase over the next ten years from six million to 15 million people and the environmental impact will be much more flattening and destructive than all the damage inflicted up until this time. The total absence of water does not seem to discourage the promoters, since they are confident that they will be able to obtain it by cutting off the supply of water to orchards and irrigated fields and, if necessary, by desalination.

Within this “Community”, the province of Alicante is the part of the territory where one has the best vantage point from which to observe the process of the domestication of society, and of the natural landscape for tourist consumption, promoted by the new, out-of-control development plans of a local ruling class, led by the construction industry and sustained by the indifference or consent of a majority of the population, depoliticized, tamed and without character. Each city undertakes, within the overarching framework of certain standardized models, to follow its own particular road towards massification and dispersion, in accordance with the narrow interests of its leaders and accompanied by the typical local-color clichés; it is curious how “Paquito el Chocolatero” [a popular song written in 1937], the “Misteri” [the “Mystery Play of Elche”, a religious procession commemorating the Assumption of the Virgin Mary] or “Les Fogueres” [the Bonfires of Saint John—established as a signature festival for Alicante in 1928, but with a long history throughout Spain as a Midsummer’s Eve festival] have served to elaborate a false identity that still endures, contributing to local amnesia and ideologically legitimizing the barbarous policies of the hierarchs, who are the first to disguise themselves as “one of the three Wise Men” [“*rey mago*”], the “Moor” or the “*foguero*”. Pseudo-traditions are weapons against memory, and therefore ideological factors contributing to deracination. The more that individuals yield to them, the more they separate themselves from their real history and the more indifferent they become towards their real surroundings. Alicante is the enclave from which decisions with the most cruel consequences for the territory originate; of the ten largest corporations in the province, six have their headquarters there (four are construction firms). Furthermore, this nowhere land offers to the gaze of the observer all the features of that type of urban theme park that is taking over the coast and transforming it into a *continuum* of vulgar, trashy cities, the most noteworthy with respect to their degree of degradation being Pego, Dénia, Benidorm, Altea, Teulada, Calp, Santa Pola, Torrevella, Almoradí, Guardamar, etc. We shall now focus on the history of the conurbation of Alicante.

We shall define Alicante — Alacant in the language of its former inhabitants — as the urban agglomeration located between the A-7 highway and the sea, bounded on the north by the town of El Campello and on the south by Santa Pola. This mass of buildings still preserves a residual structure that vaguely recalls the city that once bore the name “Alicante”, but the basic ordering elements are not the avenues or the plazas, but the transportation arterials that connect the residents with their seven shopping districts, their four or five golf courses, and their various leisure and entertainment zones, all watched over by the new, emblematic buildings, towering enormities of twenty or thirty stories. It is estimated that there is one shopping district for every seventy thousand potential consumers. Alicante is structured around the beltway and the highways to Murcia, Elx, Ibi, Alcoi and Valencia, and is broken up into seven major shopping districts, which, not counting those at the beach at San Juan, are: the Corte Inglés, the Boulevard Plaza (at the railroad station), the Gran Vía (in the northern part of the city), the Port of Alicante (at the Polígono de Babel), the Panoramis (in the port district), the Vistahermosa district (in the eastern part of the city), and the Playa Mar 2/Alcampo, in La Goteta, not far from the former “Camp of the Almond Trees”, where in April of 1939 twenty thousand republican prisoners were herded together, without any plaque to commemorate their fate. The metropolitan area of Alacant-Mutxamel-Sant Vincent del Raspeig-Sant Joan-El Campello presently has about 430,000 inhabitants, who, added to the inhabitants of the neighboring metropolitan area of Elda-Elx-Crevillent-Santa Pola altogether comprise a metropolitan area of more than 700,000 inhabitants, still not enough to really tip the scales in the network of power of globalization, which demands units of a million and a half people for viable tertiary economies. In fact, its impact on regional decisions is still minimal. Only 25 of the top 50 Valencian companies are located there, which means that its ruling class doesn’t really amount to much. In reality, it is not even a class, nor is it really even an elite; it is only a handful of predatory businessmen, mediocre public officials and careerist politicians who seem to have no other plan than to convert the whole metropolitan area into a residential suburb of Madrid thanks to the AVE high-speed rail line. Their only purpose is to follow the trail that was blazed a long time ago, the one that transforms cities into supermarkets where you only hear the discourse of the commodity. Their predecessors redesigned Alicante and imposed upon its denizens a particular use of time and space, organizing their existence in isolation and dispossession; they have merely added consumerism. For the urban environment no longer allows for any other social use of what we would unjustifiably refer to as a city besides mind-numbing work, frantic

consumption, industrialized leisure and motorized mobility. How did we get here? From what dust was this mud fashioned? Let us delve into the past of Alicante, during the Franco regime, so that we may subsequently observe the evolution of this city during the transition from a regime of national development to the present regime of globalization.

During the Republic, working class Alicante constituted a very well-defined, compact area: the district bounded by the old city center and the neighborhoods of San Antón, Las Carolinas, el Pla and Raval Roig. It was from this district that the column, “España Libre” and the battalion, “Alicante Rojo”, departed to defend Madrid, and most notably it was from this district that Francisco Maroto went forth with his proletarian centuries to liberate Granada. The rate of trade union membership was very high; Alicante constituted the second largest local federation of *sindicatos únicos*¹⁵ in the “Levantine Region” after the Valencian federation, larger than others with solid trade union traditions like Alcoi and Elda. It all came to an end on that fateful first day of April in 1939, when all of Alicante was transformed into one vast prison. Maroto, who represented the workers of Alicante at the Congress of Zaragoza, was imprisoned at the end of the war in one of the houses on the Pla del Bon Repós. The order of the Franco regime was gradually imposed on the city and the republican bourgeoisie was replaced by a class composed of Catholic oligarchs and fascist civil servants whose mission was to totally destroy the pride of the old, now-defeated proletariat and to prevent the rise of a new one. Alicante maintained a steady rate of growth during the forties and fifties, which triggered a constant flow of peasants from the southeast of Spain in search of means of survival that had eluded them in their native villages. The city’s leaders gave the green light to a series of urban development projects characterized by a total absence of order and planning, oriented more to the confinement of the working class population than to its accommodation. The new apartment buildings, with their tiny, depressing flats built with second-rate materials, were built without any relation to each other, far from the city, separated from the urban fabric of life, without either transportation or garbage collection services, often without sewer systems and sometimes even without adequate water supplies (Alicante experienced serious water shortages during the fifties). This was the origin of more than twenty “unique population entities” [“entidades singulares de población”—an official designation for statistical purposes similar to “metropolitan areas” in the United States, but also including population centers

¹⁵ Trade unions that were integrated both industrially and geographically, composed of local, regional and national federations of each industry, as well as local and regional bodies composed of the representatives of all trades in a locality or region [translator’s note].

on a much smaller scale], such as Ciudad de Asís, the area around San Gabriel, the cluster of José Antonio in Benalúa, Los Ángeles, San Agustín, and the one thousand houses whose construction was sponsored by Francisco Franco, and the cluster of towns formed by La Paz, Tómbola, Divina Pastora and Rabasa. Particularly noteworthy is the Low-Cost Housing Cooperative [La Cooperativa de Casas Baratas], which built a "Garden City" in 1960, an extremely ill-chosen name, since it had nothing to do with the ideas of Ebenezer Howard, that great anarchist dreamer, but was instead inspired by more prosaic republican plans for government-subsidized housing. The appalling conditions of the time prevented the workers from accumulating any savings and they were therefore unable to pay the dues required for membership in such cooperatives, which is why this Garden City became a peripheral island of the incipient middle class. In the late 1950s, the authorities of the Franco regime, under pressure from an enormous wave of internal migration, continued to pursue their existing construction policy. Although a General Plan for Urban Development was approved in 1958, the first such plan of this name, the municipal zoning ordinances necessary for the implementation of the Plan were not passed until 1967, when the Plan was revised to ensure the continuation of the urban anarchy that had prevailed up until that time. Alicante was a private preserve of the construction companies and their operations were so scandalous that in 1964 a lawsuit was brought against them by the Professional Association of Architects of Valencia [*Colegio de Arquitectos de Valencia*]; corruption was institutionalized, but it was not until 1969 that an insider blew the whistle on the first widely-publicized case, the delivery of 750,000 pesetas to a member of the city council. With the Taibilla reservoir compensating for the chronic water shortages, a whole series of urbanization projects was approved and a flood of new residential districts was superimposed on the already-existing towns, such as Juan XXIII, Virgen del Remedio and Colonia Requena, consolidating a ghetto outside the city's northern boundaries. To the east, government-subsidized housing was built in Fondo de Reones (the "Workers' District") and in La Sangueta. Workers with steady jobs could live in Altozano, in the various extensions of El Pla, or in one of the newly-rebuilt neighborhoods.

During the 1960s, the population of Alicante increased from 120,000 to 190,000 and the number of residential units in the city increased from 34,000 to 79,000, although the new construction was much more extensive than one might deduce from these numbers because the destruction inflicted on the old downtown district was considerable. The excesses of the construction companies were only compounded by their new predilection for verticality, with the blessing of the authorities of the Franco regime, and the old zoning

regulations that restricted buildings to seven stories were repealed. At first, this idea was conceived in accordance with the principles of rationality inherited from the modern bourgeois architecture of the Republic, as it was in that tradition that the professionals who designed the first tall buildings of the Dictatorship were trained. Beginning in the 1960s, however, the latter were replaced by a new generation of architects, whose sole motivation was greed: verticality meant more money. In 1960, the Rambla Méndez Núñez was rebuilt with tall buildings dominated by the fourteen-story Torre Provincial, and in the following year the horrible Gran Sol Hotel was built, a one-hundred meter tall glass phallus, which set the standard for Alicante's subsequent urban development. The hulking pile of Los Representantes, near the downtown market, the Corbusierian complex of 506 units that was called from its very first days by the residents of San Blas "the Beehive", along with one of the ugliest buildings in all of Europe, "the Pyramid", provided the finishing touches. The ruling class had displayed its tastes in architecture, and they were as pompous as they were repulsive. Alicante was crowded with skyscrapers, up to the point that it had more than Valencia. In 1980, in the downtown district alone, there were six buildings taller than twenty stories and more than a hundred that were at least twelve stories tall, along with numerous others of the same sort in the beachfront districts. The construction boom was stimulated, even more than by the continuous arrival of internal migrants, by the demand generated by the middle classes who came of age under the regime of endless development, who abandoned the downtown areas and preferentially relocated to the west of the city, an area that was increasingly disfigured, leading to the appearance of impersonal residential districts like Florida, Portazgo, San Blas, Polígono de San Blas, Polígono de Babel, etc., and they were forced to use automobiles to get around. The internal migration did not stop there. It was also directed towards the east (Vistahermosa, Nou Alacant) and towards the shore, and first of all to the beachfront at San Juan. Meanwhile, the former working class neighborhoods of the old city were targeted by avaricious speculators, who wasted no time in demolishing them in order to replace their former houses with enormous, tasteless buildings, symbols of the power of Alicante's new bourgeoisie. This is what happened in parts of Benalúa, Raval Roig, Campoamor, Santa Cruz and El Pla. In the same vein, a "unique building" like the Meliá Hotel raised a wall between the beach of El Postiguete and the port district. Another uniquely aberrant pile of masonry, the Feygon building or the "Alicante", did the same at the Explanada; together with the Gran Sol and the

Riscal building, it defined the new *skyline*¹⁶ of the real estate moguls. Modernized Alicante was no longer a city attached to its port and contained within the precinct defined by the railroad station, the Castle of San Fernando and Mount Benacantil. Its radial structure was abolished, replaced by a conglomeration parallel to the sea, divided into three pieces: one, crossed by the highways from Santa Pola and Elx leading to Murcia and Madrid, was the zone of industrial complexes and warehouses; another was constituted by the city properly speaking and its outlying districts; the third was the zone of the beaches. Alicante was originally a city designed by a liberal bourgeoisie with close relations to the countryside and to maritime trade that was hardly disturbed by the hustle and bustle of horse and carriage traffic. The uncontrolled growth that it underwent under the Franco regime shattered not only the internal equilibrium between its neighborhoods, but also the city's equilibrium with the nearby rural districts. The worst offender in this regard was the automobile. The pro-development municipal administration attempted to adapt the city to motor vehicle traffic by orienting its growth around the main transportation arterial, the Alfonso X el Sabio Avenue, and a focal point, the Plaza de los Luceros, but the motorization of the middle classes rendered any rational solution to the traffic problem impossible, and conditions only got worse with continuous urban expansion. By 1967, the automobile had become, along with verticalization and the suburbs, the third factor of destruction of the city, and the most effective instrument of a barbarous urbanism.

During the 1970s the population of Alicante increased by 70,000. Construction in the new districts continued under the aegis of piecemeal development plans targeting various parts of the city. The Adoc building, a vertical monstrosity on the seashore inspired by fascist architecture (the Torre Pirelli of Milan), inaugurated the mutilation of Albufereta, while along the shoreline at San Juan enormous apartment complexes were still being built without rhyme or reason. Within a few years, nothing at all remained of Alicante's agricultural hinterland and its venerable stone towers. Unlike Benidorm, where the vertical impulse initially obeyed the strictures of a conservation plan to protect the remnants of the coast—which, by the way, was unsuccessful—here it was all business, symbolizing in its own way the totalitarianism of the new society, whenever the symbols of a real political and social life have been erased. In the capital of the province is the Riscal building, now the Estudiotel Alicante, thirty-five stories tall; we can imagine what kind of “dialogue” of forms that this gigantic cuboid pile of cement carries on with its

¹⁶ In English in the original text [translator's note].

surroundings. The anti-natural character of these skyscrapers was so pronounced that, in contact with the benign climate of Alicante, the anti-esthetic element par excellence was elevated to a category of the city's trademark scenic landscape: the sun-awning [*toldo*]. The fragmented city became a socially neutral, zoned space, sown with erect architectural lumps of shit, but without any reference points, and therefore without memory, even without language: the fate of the Valencian language is testimony to this. It became a disordered and vulgar place, a backdrop for making money, ideal for a mass-produced, privatized and consumerist lifestyle. Officially, the conurbation of Alicante was born in 1973 with the creation of the Municipal Consortium [*Mancomunidad*] composed of Alicante and its neighboring cities, which meant that traffic jams, gentrification of the downtown areas, destruction of the landscape, disappearance of the local agriculture and immeasurable generation of waste were no longer specifically Alicantian problems. All the coastal areas of the province succumbed to the same pathology, particularly in the south, where the water of the Tajo-Segura diversion project allowed the construction of countless urban centers. Any adventurer could set up as a real estate speculator in one of the coastal cities and get rich quickly. In ten years, the small real estate brokers and construction firms had become powerful corporate actors allied with the banks, and wielded major influence in the local municipal governments. The construction companies were the spearhead of the new bourgeoisie, and they were the ones who would be calling the shots in the "democratic" political future. The combative proletariat of the republican era has been replaced by a much more numerous, yet also much more docile, successor. Without any tradition and without any past, it came to Alicante without really penetrating it, remaining isolated in its peripheral enclaves, which were veritable deposits of labor power without qualities. It did not possess the means to produce its own collective identity in its neighborhoods, and therefore it was incapable of constituting a community of interests, that is, of establishing class bonds. Nor was it capable of acting as a class at its workplaces. There was hardly any industry in Alicante, and most jobs were in the service sector, construction and management. A tertiary economy does not need any special infrastructure, nor does it require any particular preconditions, unlike an industrial economy; its occupations do not demand even the most cursory apprenticeship; its workers are warehouse laborers, construction laborers, waiters, retail clerks, civil servants, hotel housekeepers, restaurant workers, domestic servants, etc. The size of the enterprises of the tertiary sector is often quite small, which is why the workers are dispersed and isolated, competing with one another, many with temporary contracts, others working in the underground economy, off the

books. This precarious existence is compounded by their lack of roots; thousands of workers have come to Alicante — and are still arriving — just to work during the summer season and then go home, and at least half of its population increase is accounted for by recent arrivals, born elsewhere. In such circumstances, the external contribution of the proletarian element only serves to accelerate the decomposition of the native working class. Despite the fact that wage workers constitute more than four-fifths of the population, the working class of Alicante would never acquire the combative spirit that was attained by the working class in nearby cities such as Elx, Alcoi or Elda.

Political change did not transform the economic landscape. The socialist municipal administration did not depart from the legacy of the Franco regime, and only limited its initiatives to rationalizing the development trend, by gilding the pill of its brutality, and making preparations for expected future challenges. Thanks to the fact that the population had stabilized in the 1980s, urban renewal and infrastructure rehabilitation projects were implemented in the various city neighborhoods, the circle of the beltway of highways around the city was completed (the Gran Vía), and a new PGOU [*Plan General Municipal de Ordenación Urbana* — General Guidelines for Municipal Urban Planning] was formulated that made large tracts land that were ideal for urban development available for real estate development. In 1986 the new middle classes commenced their exodus from their traditional downtown neighborhoods towards the eastern outskirts of the city (El Garbinet, Vistahermosa) and the beach zones, spurring a surge in demand for housing, parking and vehicular access. This was the death sentence of certain relatively well-preserved places like Cabo de las Huertas and La Condomina. Housing prices went through the roof and stimulated new construction, once again the driving force of the local economy. Furthermore, the opening of El Corte Inglés diverted all shopping activity to Maisonnave Avenue, sealing the fate of the old downtown shopping district—the historic San Francisco section of the old city—which had previously performed this function, and which then began to decay while awaiting its museification and conversion into a leisure and entertainment zone. This new “hotspot” was itself provisional, however, for during the next decade its retail earnings would be split with other emerging “hotspots”. The touristic vocation of Alicante affirmed by the socialists was still in effect; El Altet had become the fourth busiest airport on the peninsula during the summer months, the chosen destination of five million sun and sand tourists. The tourists did not come to stay, however. Ever since the sixties, Alicante was only a temporary destination even for those who worked there. In fact, the main activity of the Alicante metropolitan area was the construction of

second homes, first of all for the residents of Alicante itself, and then for the residents of Madrid and the elderly residents of the North. The socialist government of the country faced an intractable contradiction. Its electoral base, the middle class, had made its own contributions to the destruction of the city and was not going to support anti-development policies, which is why, far from opposing the forces against which it could hardly fight, it tried to form an alliance with them by crushing the last obstacle standing in the way of the creation of a real national real estate market, i.e., the small-scale landowner. The law governing land ownership passed in 1990 placed serious limitations on the rights of ownership and provided the regional governments with the most effective instrument to suppress protests against the abuses of the urban development programs. The Valencian Generalitat, in the hands of the socialists, passed a Law for the Regulation of Urban Development that effectively surrendered the municipal governments to the construction interests. In the guise of the figure of the “agent of urbanization”, the *alter ego* of the real estate development promoters, the small-scale landowner or homeowner was expropriated without the right of appeal, and obliged to pay the expenses of the urbanization of the property which he or she had owned for many years, provided only that the municipal government would approve a Plan for Integral Jurisdiction presented by that very same “agent”. The excesses were proportional to the economic interests at stake, that is to say, they were very numerous, and would continue to characterize the whole subsequent period ¹⁷.

When the People’s Party assumed control over the Valencian Generalitat, it was the construction industry that really took power. With the industrial crisis battering the three provinces and agriculture in the process of becoming extinct, the ruling class was still playing its same high stakes game; in the case of Alicante, not affected by outsourcing, an attempt was made to exploit “la millor terreta del món” [the “old sod”] ¹⁸ for speculative purposes. The key element for the speculators was not so much the resistance of the small-scale landowners against the developers, but rather the whole system governing the assessment of real property valuations. Merely changing the zoning classification of real estate automatically multiplied its price by a factor of 25, which is why real estate transactions normally began with the purchase of some rural, industrial, infrastructure- or entertainment-related, green zone, etc., real estate, at a ridiculously low price, followed by its transformation into real estate subject to urban development. The ensuing re-zoning of urban real estate proceeded at a

¹⁷ This legal expropriation of property owners is analogous to the law of “eminent domain” in the United States [translator’s note].

¹⁸ An expression that denotes love for one’s locality or region, in this case Alicante [translator’s note].

frenzied pace, and even caused prices to rise so high that they had to be compensated for by verticality. The 1998 Reform of the Real Property Assessment Law passed by the People's Party offered the opportunity to convert any parcel of land into real estate eligible for urban development, which made more land available on the market at a time when housing had been transformed into a mere investment. Speculation became institutionalized. When interest rates fell and the stock market collapsed, their constant rise in prices made the purchase of residential properties very profitable (between 1996 and 2005, the cost of a house on the coast tripled). This is demonstrated by the fact that in 2001, 16% of the residential properties in the province were vacant; in Alicante alone there were 22,000 vacant residential units. The first thing the "People's" administration did was authorize the resumption of various development projects that had been suspended due to a series of criminal investigations, most notably the Alicante building (previously known as the Feygon building), a veritable architectural behemoth situated in the shopping district, and to increase the maximum height of future construction by fifteen floors. The regulations established by the previous PGOU had in the meantime become obstacles to the construction industry, which lobbied for the drafting of a new, more permissive PGOU. Work on this new PGOU began in 2000, and in 2002 a preliminary revision was released. The real estate boom was extended by a powerful injection of credit and by the arrival of foreign capital, the product of the internationalization of the secondary mortgage market and the market for second homes. Now the real estate business was trying to attract the European ruling class, adapting its advertisements to the limitations of the lifestyle of the retired executive: good communications, video surveillance, swimming pools, parking garages, golf courses and gyms. The policies of the coastal conurbations are directly ruled by the construction industry. All the talk about "sustainable" growth, as well as the new legislation (the Valencian Urban Development Law and the Law for Territorial Development) merely announce that from now on the abuses will be dissimulated and regulated. The second most powerful sector is that of distribution (in Alicante, 44% of enterprises are retail sales operations, and half of the surface of the city is devoted to shopping centers and supermarkets). The big shopping centers are not places for buying necessary provisions but veritable instruments of urbanization. They are the actual urban reference points, the authentic poles of orientation; they define the new functional districts of the conurbation and tend to concentrate all commercial, cultural and leisure activity within their precincts. Outside of these areas, it would be hard to find a bookstore or a movie theater in Alicante—and this in a city that has sponsored a public relations campaign to characterize it as a "city

of the cinema". In these retail concentrations the everyday life of the residents is rendered susceptible to industrial processing. The economic globalization that took place between 1995 and 2005 produced more far-reaching changes than any preceding period with respect to labor, ways of life and the character of society. During the period of globalization, the environment of Alicante radically simplified its everyday lifestyle. Holed up in their apartments, its residents only ventured forth to drive their cars to the privileged sites of encounter with the commodity, entertainment districts and shopping centers, strolls on the beach or on the streets of some theme-park style, high-security, redefined neighborhood, from which every last trace of poverty, marginalization and misery has been eliminated. Hence the insatiable demand for parking lots and office space. Alicante is part of the world market and this is best illustrated by the immigrant population that is arriving from countries impoverished by capitalism to perform the most degrading jobs and resides in the vacated homes of the declining neighborhoods abandoned by workers with better prospects, such as, for example, Virgen del Remedio, Virgen del Carmen, Juan XXIII, San Antón and San Gabriel. There are now about thirty thousand immigrants in Alicante, and they account for the most recent increase in the population of the city. They are not an underclass or a new lumpenproletariat. They are workers who have been uprooted by capitalist globalization from their towns and cities and thrown onto the internationalized labor market in the worst possible conditions. They are the advance units of a movement that is similar to the one that brought millions of peasants to the cities between 1940 and 1980, and the effects they will have on the advanced zones of capitalism will be considerable. The social question will not be posed again without taking them into account.

Barring a major financial crisis, exacerbated by a brutal drought that would render all water diversion projects useless, the logic of capitalism will drive the conurbation of Alicante to endless growth, destroying more territory and concentrating more population. The 15,000 useless residential units of the Rabasa Plan are the most immediate example, but not the worst, since the real estate market will not stop expanding and disintegrating the small-scale industrial economies of the inland municipalities and transforming them into satellites of the predatory economy of the coast. Obviously, if one wants to defend the territory from the avalanche of development plans that are currently being promoted one will have to stop the process of urbanization by confronting the powerful real estate interests, which are abundantly represented in the municipal governments by corrupt politicians and on the venal executive boards of the savings banks. A mass movement with a well defined program of struggle, one

that will clearly delineate the contending parties, is necessary. To begin, we have to dispense with all political programs that call for more development, such as, for example, the plans promoted by the opposition socialists, the platforms of the “green” left or the environmentalists: municipal or regional government purchase of land and buildings, green tourism, the construction of “low-income” housing, the re-zoning of rural real estate for development projects, etc. Different proposals can serve to prepare for the collective re-appropriation of space if they are situated within the perspective of de-urbanization and ruralization: a moratorium on development projects, special tax levies on vacant housing, organic agriculture, urban gardens, renovation of the homes of workers ... to which we can add the occupation of vacant buildings, the rejection of private transportation, boycotting the big corporate retail outlets, intervention to lower the price of housing and to freeze the accounts of the construction companies. To make Alicante habitable we will have to undo the long process of urbanization described above and demolish two-thirds of its buildings. The social struggle will be fundamentally opposed to development and urbanization, or it will not exist. However, neither the suppression of the market for housing nor the reconstruction of the countryside will be sufficient unless they are accompanied by a way of life that is alien to consumerism, unless wage labor is abolished, unless the public space is reconstructed, unless the party system is abolished, unless the citizens’ assembly is restored, unless the lost knowledge and customs that have fallen into disuse are recovered, unless community exchanges are restored, unless ways of human coexistence are established, free and egalitarian and based on the locality, and unless all the other aspects of generalized territorial self-management are present.

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The above text is based on a lecture delivered at the Ateneo Libertario L’Escletxa de Alicante on July 6, 2006; it was later published as a pamphlet.

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Original text:

“Todo el mundo es como un no-lugar llamado Alicante”

Primitivism in Technological Society

“I am as free as nature first made man,
Ere the base laws of servitude began,
When wild in woods the noble savage ran.”

John Dryden, “The Conquest of Granada”, 17th century.

As capitalism entered the phase of globalization, all of society was immersed in a technological system that imprisons and conditions it. Technological society is at the same time the most hierarchical and the most oppressive society. Power, authority and wealth have been concentrated in increasingly smaller groups, while oppression assumes new forms and spreads, penetrating every aspect of everyday life, and can do so all the more easily as the degree of technological saturation of society increases. Technology seduces its victims with a promise of freedom that engulfs and imprisons those who succumb to it. Uprooted and domesticated individuals survive in a space that has been re-defined by technology, in a technosphere, one that entails a way of life dominated by consumption, work, standardization, isolation and mobility. A world that is increasingly more artificial and uninhabitable emerges, sown with nuclear power plants, GMOs, shopping malls, highways, toxic waste dumps and residential zones, configuring a space where social control, predatory urbanism and environmental destruction can develop unhindered, and where the loss of collective autonomy and the moral and psychological collapse of individuals are endowed with a *carte blanche* for their boundless progress.

The resistance to the techno-capitalist project of total enslavement has been expressed in the form of the protest against developmentalism, in anti-nuclear contestation, in the defense of the territory and in the struggles against precariousness, but it is still a long way from unifying its anti-systemic proposals and formulating a radical project. In the meantime, it must ward off an internal threat, that posed by recuperation by the political system, corrupt mainstream reform groups, neutral ecologism or the pseudo-movements of the civil society type, those that are trying to reduce the real resistance movement to the mere choreography of the co-management of the catastrophe, a pure electoral base for the leaders of groups devoted to advocating the position that another form of capitalism is possible.

Another no less important danger is posed by false consciousness and ideological deviation. The anti-developmental critique is only just emerging. It is largely spontaneous and still lacks any perspective for reaching a unitary consciousness of the world. Under these circumstances, the theoretical blank spaces can be badly filled with ideologies that seek to explain the world from a particular determination, from a limited and more or less abstract concept—such as the role that nature or wildness might play for primitivism—by means of *sui generis* simplifications based on sociological, ethnographic and anthropological discoveries.

One of these ideas is primitivism. It was born in the 1990s in the United States, the product of the confluence of the remnants of the counterculture, “deep” ecology and individualist and nature-oriented anarchism, and made its public debut in Seattle. Primitivism does not constitute a finished system, much to the contrary, since there are as many primitivisms as there are groups that reject civilized life and call for a return to nature, whatever that is, which is why we shall focus our criticism of primitivism on the ideas that are most often repeated by all its factions.

Primitivism has passed through two stages; in the first, it appeared in the form of an insufficient and fragmentary critique of modern society, which nonetheless contained a kernel of truth and at least partially clarified the perspective opened up by the anti-developmental struggles. By turning back to the primitive, it sought to overcome the contradiction between the oppressive capitalist system and the noble aspiration for freedom that is felt by human beings.

For that reason it constituted an advance. In its second stage, the current one, when it attempted to consolidate as an ideology and rejected the idea of revolution, it fell into a paralyzing fatalism that was more conducive to inspiring hiking trips than revolt, to the cooking workshop rather than the barricade, and became, much more so than the Black Bloc, an obstacle to the understanding of struggles and an excuse for inactivity. Then its ideology coincided with the nature motif with which the classical bourgeoisie imagined that it could exorcise the evils of its own civilization. In short, the primitivist Robinsonades have degenerated into a form of urban flight reminiscent of the bourgeois-idyllic fantasy of the countryside. The primitivists do not seek the roots of modern oppression in the historical appearance of capitalism, nor in the idea of “progress” that was contained already in the core of bourgeois ideology, but in the birth of what they call “civilization”, which most of them situate at about ten thousand years ago, when man passed from a way of life characterized by hunting and gathering to one that was characterized by

herding and agriculture. Civilization as an idea was therefore opposed to that of “nature”, the kingdom of happiness, abundance, play and freedom, which they identified with Paleolithic society, preferably the Mousterian era, that of Neanderthal man.

Some primitivists, advocates of veganism, do not even accept hunting and imagine a past epoch where the ruminants provided the model for an exemplary life. They are supporters of permaculture, a variety of “sustainable” agriculture, and of eco-villages. For the primitivist, the “free society of free producers”, or “anarchy”, as they used to call it seventy years ago, is not a society that will be, but something from which they extract their poetry of the past, a society that already existed in the confines of prehistory, when, at the most, one million people with a life expectancy of less than thirty years inhabited the Earth. The life of freedom was identified with the nomadic lifestyle, with the Pacific tribes, with the reign of the instincts and the passions, with the “wild” condition, that is, one that was not domesticated by “civilization”, the source of all evils, of authority, of patriarchy, of property, of war, of slavery, of technology, of the city, of classes, of science, etc. This idea of primitive man is by no means recent and is far overshadowed by the notion of “*homo sylvaticus*”, the man of the forests, first documented in European codices from the 12th century that were based on ancient Greco-Latin and Judeo-Christian traditions. In the Middle Ages teleology had excavated an abyss between man and nature that was just as deep and as wide as the one that capitalist artificialization is now digging, which is why it is not at all surprising that the stereotypes of the two eras should be similar. This myth would survive in the Enlightenment and Romanticism in the figure of the “noble savage”, elaborated on the basis of American or Australian models, and would even contaminate the rigorous analyses of thinkers like Marx and Engels, who also believed in a primitive communist Golden Age. The primitive has during this entire period been the reflected image that is opposed to the typical personality of any particular era: that of the medieval villager whose life was regulated by religion; that of the enlightened bourgeois who sought Reason in the code of nature; that of the revolutionary who aspired to a free society, fraternal and without aristocrats; or that of the romantic frustrated by the ugliness of capitalist industry; just as it is that of the mass-man of globalization in today’s world.

We could devote ourselves to discussing, with reference to the same sources, this alleged primitive freedom, since there is ample evidence that the custom of killing other human beings, seizing territories and destroying the environment was prevalent in very early stages of human evolution. If we turn to the matriarchal family, we are unable to distinguish between it and what now is

called the single-parent family, which is not exactly a factor conducive to freedom. On the other hand, agrarian societies were not necessarily class societies, nor did the Neolithic period absolutely coincide with an “agricultural revolution” that gave rise to hierarchy, the city and “civilization”. Historical and anthropological studies, however, are not the strong suit of primitivist ideology, which only has resort to them to give shape and unity to its discourse, rather than in order to get closer to the truth. Because man, and society, are defined by the way they appropriate the fruits of nature, it is absurd to imagine an epoch where this was not the case, and human behavior was identical to that of the animals. The evil “civilization” of the primitivists is nothing but a moment of history. From the dawn of humanity and over the whole course of its historical development, the human creature has never found freedom and happiness in a pure state. Neither his initial stages nor his latest ones, however, no matter how hard it is for us to believe this, have been epochs of simple barbarism. Oppression compelled the creation of the concept of freedom. Every instance of barbarism has also been an instance of culture. Artisanal knowledge, philosophical and ethical thought, literature, art, medicine, scientific knowledge, law, psychoanalysis, etc., have all provided enough material to develop egalitarian social consciousness and orient conduct towards freedom and the realization of desire. History has not been a mistake, or a deviation from a happy age. By referring back to previous epochs as if he wanted to escape from history, the primitivist identifies the process of humanization of the world with that of the domestication and artificialization of man. Such a reduction condemns freedom to the status of a mere detail of a utopian dream, one that is just as impossible to attain as the return to the state of nature, when in reality freedom is only the reward of the victorious struggle against barbarism, and therefore against that same domestication and artificialization. To use a sylvan metaphor, freedom is thus not the consequence of life in the forests, but the fruit of the struggle against deforestation. Freedom is not a lost natural state but a social reality that is reformulated at each historical moment.

The rejection of the class struggle, its organizational forms, its solidarity projects, and its revolutionary goals, cannot fail to have consequences when the time comes for action. The primitivist tends to ignore the struggles of the oppressed, just as he ignores History, since according to him these struggles have never pursued anything but power. Since he does not aspire to change society but to flee from it, he does not feel that he is implicated in its conflicts. We shall not ridicule his attempts to go back to nature since everyone knows that such a return to paradise is impossible and he only refers to this goal as a source of inspiration. But this inspiration does not bring him closer to reality, it

does not reveal to him the anti-capitalist — and anti-technological — potentials of conflicts, but keeps him in a state of waiting, hedonistically expecting that a catastrophe will resettle a disillusioned humanity in the aboriginal jungle and put rational thought back on the road of instinct, magic and voodoo.

Not at all being inclined to amuse ourselves in the search for the causes of oppression in the emergence of symbolic language or the domestication of the horse, we must instead concentrate on the most proximate causes: the logic of profit and productivity, material interest as the motivating principle of society, the market as its regulatory mechanism, instrumental reason; we are referring to the capitalist system, and specifically to its phase of globalization. There are, of course, more distant causes, prior to capitalism: the division of labor, the state, the Mega-machine, hierarchies, religion, property, classes, war.... The anti-developmental critique, the historical heir of the thought that emerged from the class struggle, must not ignore these causes, or else it would only serve the reproduction of oppression under other forms, but it knows that these causes have attained their maximum level under capitalism, and that they are currently shaped by the capitalist chisel. This even applies to religious faith, which now takes the form of the fetishism of techno-science. Capitalism is the master of the world and therefore every real struggle is and will continue to be an anti-capitalist struggle. The short-term objectives that must be established, as partial as they might be, cannot be satisfied in capitalism. To make production decline to the level of twenty years ago, to reduce the consumption of meat and dairy products, to put an end to the factory farming of domestic animals, to drastically limit the use of fossil fuels, to prohibit the private vehicle, to freeze the accounts of the real estate developers and construction companies, to reconstruct the polluted territories covered in concrete and asphalt, to restore the commons, to restore the urban gardens, to municipalize, de-urbanize, dismantle energy industries and power plants, recycle, use local products, re-use things.... These are the practical measures that can help construct a minimum anti-developmental program. The defenders of technological progress will call it extravagant, but the ultra-developmental plans that the greed of their promoters never ceases to bestow upon us are even more extravagant.

Miquel Amorós.

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“El primitivismo en la sociedad tecnológica”

Origins and Development of Workers Autonomy in Spain (1970-1976)

“AUTONOMY: Independent decision-making. The autonomy of the workers movement with respect to political parties, the government or any other kind of leadership is indispensable to guarantee the power of the workers struggle, to prevent it from being held back by excessively rigid control.”

The Militant Worker's Dictionary, Nuestra Clase, September 1970.

1970 was a crucial year for the class struggle in Spain. After a decade of industrial development, a new working class was consolidated and resumed the class struggle with new fervor. There were eight million blue collar workers, 65% of the active population. Although they lived in a situation of full employment and had a certain degree of access to consumer goods, their wages were low and the cost of living was constantly rising. The pressure of high prices and the wage freeze decreed by the Government, and the combative habits acquired during the previous decade, combined to drive the workers to commence the struggle. In 1970 there were three times as many strikes as in 1969, posing a serious challenge to the repressive apparatus of the dictatorship. The workers of the large enterprises, located for the most part in Barcelona, Madrid, the left bank of the Nervión and the Asturian mining region, yielded the leading role in the struggle to the young proletariat—which had in the meantime absorbed many women—which had been born in the industrial outskirts of the two capitals and in the industrial zones of the Franco regime; in Goierri (Guipúzcoa), Valladolid, Pamplona, Vitoria, Seville, Saragossa, etc. The active solidarity it was capable of organizing around a strike was quite surprising, and was even at times capable of affecting an entire province, as was the case, for example, with the strike at Orbeagozo, a steel mill in Zumárraga (Guipúzcoa), soon after the New Year. The heroic strike of the Cold Rolling Mill at Echegarri, between January and May 1967, is widely acknowledged to be the first radical strike; while the strike at Blansol, a factory employing a hundred workers in Palau de Plegamans (Barcelona), which took place between November and December of 1968, was the first strike conducted by assemblies. In fact, the Government had to declare a state of emergency in Vizcaya in order to break the wall of solidarity that protected the strikers at the Rolling Mill, and

as for the workers at Blansol, even though they were surrounded by the Civil Guard, they met either during their lunch break or in a pine forest near the factory gates after work to make decisions, organize pickets and even to discuss how to deal with scabs or plan acts of sabotage. The first specifically assembly-based strike, however — that is, the first strike that was completely outside the control of the vertical trade union — the first to impose the leadership of a committee of twelve workers elected at an assembly, was the strike at Authi, at the Landaben industrial park (Pamplona), during the month of March in 1970. This tactic expressed a greater degree of determination on the part of the workers, and it began to have repercussions in reformist circles. Even the Workers Commissions [*Comisiones Obreras* — CCOO] resorted to assemblies in the union halls of the vertical trade union to debate contracts and to vote on strikes, even though their usual practice was to call for demonstrations at the factory gates to support their negotiators. This was the case in the construction workers strike in Granada. A large part of the surplus agrarian population that emigrated to the cities found jobs as construction workers, the only way that many of them could gain a foothold in the labor market. The conditions on the job sites were so deplorable that class consciousness arose spontaneously, without any need for agitators, and this drove the construction workers to action. In July, in Granada, when a demonstration called by the vertical trade union was dispersed by the police, three workers were killed, the first casualties of the proletariat in its second assault on Spanish class society. The wave of repression took a qualitative leap forward (up until that point the regime thought the students posed the greater threat; its secret services had not yet infiltrated the working class milieu). This galvanized the whole country and the debate on whether or not to use the Franco regime's trade union institutions became more heated. Overall, the working class had acquired sufficient maturity to question the need for a vanguard leadership and the legalistic tactics typical of the previous period. The common experience in the factories had raised their level of consciousness and posed problems such as self-organization, final goals, and tactics of struggle. The reformism that had dominated the workers movement up until that time was seriously questioned in more and more factories. Many workers straightforwardly rejected both the tutelage of the parties and labor organizations as well as the methods of struggle based on the respectful and timid attitudes of the negotiators. They did not want to have anything to do with the Franco regime's Trade Union Organization; besides, the very needs imposed by self-defense against police repression led the militants to decide to dilute the leadership elements in assemblies and to act by way of secret committees. Nor were they disposed to

reduce the struggle to negotiations over contracts, which is what the Christian-Stalinist sector of the Workers Commissions wanted. At the end of the 1960s, Factory or Enterprise Committees appeared in the Basque Country and, in the industrial belt of Barcelona, somewhat later, the Commission Platforms or Independent Workers Commissions, ephemeral organizational experiences that encouraged collective participation and management of conflicts. The strike at the Harry Walker plant, a factory in the Sant Andreu neighborhood of Barcelona, which occurred between December 1970 and February 1971, is said to be the first major assembly-based strike in Catalonia. There were, however, several previous strikes coordinated by committees that proved to be decisive; for example, the strike at Maquinista, in January-March 1970, and at Macosa in December of 1970, both in Barcelona. The influence of the French May was not immediately felt in the Spanish working class milieu, in part because its radicalism irritated the parties and political groups, whose vanguardism was being challenged, but by 1970 the ideas of self-management, self-organization, workers councils, occupations, sovereign assemblies, etc., became commonplace among class conscious workers and gave rise to the birth of ephemeral groups tailored to different situations such as the GOA, the MIL and the MCL (in Barcelona), "Barricada" (in Valencia), the group known as "Acracia" (in Madrid), the CRAS (in Asturias), the people associated with the publisher ZYX, and many others. Anarchosindicalism and council communism ceased to be ideologies buried in the closets of history and became instead the current topics of study and the arsenals of ways of life and ideals. The incipient interest in the history of the workers movement and the civil war connected the new working class with its revolutionary past.

On December 1, 1970, the Government publicly announced the secret trial of 16 members of the ETA; the prosecutor was calling for the death penalty. The Burgos Council of War unleashed a wave of protests that were only exacerbated after the announcement of the sentences and the death of a demonstrator in Eibar. Various committees were formed to continue the struggle, holding assemblies in churches and public squares attended by thousands of people. On December 14 the Government proclaimed a state of emergency in Guipúzcoa in an attempt to bring the situation under control; then it extended the state of emergency to the whole country until June. The social and political struggle forced the regime to mount a more obdurate repression, abolishing the few guarantees of civil rights that it still offered and even resorting to martial law, but in the end it had to yield and revoke the death sentences. On December 31, the death sentences were commuted and replaced with other penalties. On the other hand, however, the repression, under the shield of the suspension of civil

rights, only grew more fierce. The new trade union law of February reduced the representation of the workers in the vertical trade unions even more, but this only harmed the Stalinists. The working class was not intimidated and severed its connections with the regime's trade unions, which the Catholic and Stalinist trade union militants were unable to rejuvenate. The trade union elections of May 17, 1971 were widely boycotted except by the PCE and the USO; half the eligible workers abstained from voting. Although the Workers Commissions were no longer a movement and were nothing but a group of Stalinist workers or their sympathizers, they enjoyed a certain amount of prestige among the most backward workers, and, for that reason, exercised a real, although declining, influence. In the big factories of Barcelona and the Basque Country the rate of abstention was higher, and even more so if you take into account the null votes (hundreds of workers voted for media celebrities like Raphael, El Cordobés or Cassius Clay). They only recognized their own direct representatives elected in the assemblies. It was precisely the refusal of the employers to recognize these representatives that was the cause of the Potasas strike in Navarre and the Eaton Ibérica strike (whose workers sent a delegation to the Harry Walker assembly), destined to have repercussions in the Pamplona industrial zone. A similar case was that of the strike of the female workers at Bianchi in Rentería. This radicalization was manifested in Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, Asturias, and especially in Barcelona (strikes at Maquinista, Miniwatt, Roca, and the Water Company), with "wildcat" strikes that were often accompanied by violent demonstrations. Given the government's policy of zero tolerance for protests, the strikes became a problem of civil order from the very start, and the least significant demand became a political question. The police violence aroused enormous indignation that divided society into two parts: on the one side, the workers; on the other, the regime and the employers. In September, a worker in Madrid was killed during the construction workers strike. In October, during the strike at SEAT in the duty-free zone (Barcelona), the entire negotiating committee, composed for the most part of certified liaisons and authorized officials of the vertical trade unions, that is, of legal representatives, was arrested and imprisoned. The workers occupied the factory and when they were evicted one worker was killed and several others were injured. With the death of the Madrid construction worker and the deaths in Granada still fresh in people's memories, the incident had enormous repercussions. Numerous solidarity strikes and protests took place. Every fallen worker only further strengthened resolve among the proletarian ranks.

1972 got off to an explosive start due to the combativity of the concentrations of workers that were usually the most active, the same ones that boycotted the

elections to the vertical unions: the industrial belt of Barcelona, the big factories in Vizcaya (Spanish General Electric, Babcock & Wilcox, the shipyards, Euskalduna, Endesa, etc.), the factories in Guipúzcoa, the white collar employees in Madrid.... The panorama was completed with the entry into the social fray of the workers from the provinces without any tradition of struggle. On January 26, 1972, a strike was declared at the Michelin factory in Vitoria. For a month the workers held daily assemblies, organized pickets and attended demonstrations; at times they confronted the forces of public order, and paid for it with several wounded. The strike made history among the workers of Álava and gave rise to the groups known as Workers Action [Acción Obrera]. Its delegates made contact with the general strike of the workers of El Ferrol, which was also conducted by way of daily assemblies and demonstrations. On March 10, two workers from El Ferrol were killed and more than twenty were wounded (one died shortly thereafter). Solidarity actions were carried out all over the Peninsula and the May Day demonstrations were attended by large numbers of people. The workers constituted a very cohesive and active social sector, with a strong sense of dignity, that is, they formed a class. Their proportionate weight in the struggle against the Dictatorship was overwhelming, having almost completely overshadowed the role of the students. All political calculations had to take them into account, and workerist ideologies then became fashionable. Every strike meant much more than a mere labor conflict; without having intended to do so, they acquired the character of a struggle for freedom, for the overthrow of the regime, for the abolition of economic inequalities, for the expropriation of the capitalists, for the self-management of production, etc. The will of the workers to participate in their own struggles could only be expressed by way of assemblies and the delegates elected at the assemblies; the factory was relegated to a minor role once the conflict commenced, because the workers took to the streets and defended themselves against the thugs mobilized by the forces of repression. Repression only awakened solidarity and extended the scope of the struggle. Layoffs, firings, arrests and fines often prolonged strikes or even caused them. Social groups which had up until then been dormant, such as bank employees, hospital custodians, disabled people, truck drivers, administrators and teachers, mobilized and held assemblies. The prestige of the proletariat was so great that these people happily called themselves Bank workers, Healthcare workers, Administrative workers or Educational workers. The army itself was challenged by the first conscientious objectors who, together with deserters, introduced the seeds of subversion into one of the fundamental pillars of the Franco regime. General strikes comprised the response to the stagnation of any particular

conflict with a long-forgotten libertarian tactic, direct action, that is, the extension of the strike to the other industries of the county or province. The general strike in Vigo, which began on September 11 and lasted fifteen days, raised questions that completely surpassed the bounds of reformism. In this case, the initial cause of the strike was the firing of workers at the Citroën factory. The workers extended the conflict by way of pickets which, as an innovative tactic, gave rise to assemblies in the factories that were visited by the picket squads to inform the workers of the cause of their strike.

The overall tone of 1973 was similar to that of the previous year. Class consciousness only grew stronger in a climate of constant struggle. A minor detail like the refusal to work overtime or work longer hours meant much more than a simple labor demand: the workers preferred to have free time rather than more money. Reformism experienced its darkest days. Leftists challenged the PCE for the leadership of the CCOO, ousting it in some places like the Basque Country and Navarre, and, on the opposing side, the advocates of working class self-organization were becoming more and more numerous. Workers committees, groups of autonomous workers, anarchosyndicalist cells, etc., were rising up from the ashes of previous organizations and from the strikes, contributing their efforts in favor of the radicalization of the struggle. Meanwhile, the PCE, taking advantage of the publicity that the repression had provided for its cadres, worked to cultivate leadership cliques. The judicial investigation associated with the “1001 Trial” [*Proceso 1001*] was just what was needed to transform a dozen mediocre labor bureaucrats [*bonzos*] into martyrs of the proletariat, who were as useful for the “party” in prison as they were later when they were released, when it was the party’s turn to squelch the workers movement. At the end of March the workers employed in the construction of the Besós Power Plant called a strike based on job-related demands. The owners of the power plant responded by laying them all off and shutting down the project. When the workers attempted to occupy the worksite on April 3, they clashed with the police. The result was one dead worker and one worker seriously wounded. The response was immediate: partial work stoppages in protest of police violence spread throughout the whole region of Barcelona; on April 6 there was a general strike in the towns of Sardanyola and Ripollet, and later in the whole Vallès district. The climate of agitation spread to Navarre, which was truly prodigious in its strikes. One of these strikes, that of Motor Ibérica, caused by the employer’s refusal to abide by the terms of a court order in favor of the workers, gave rise to the well-known series of events that concluded during the month of July in a general strike in Pamplona and other

cities in Navarre (Tafalla, Estella, Alsásua...). At the other end of the Peninsula, at the same time, the workers of Intelhorce occupied the Málaga Cathedral.

This was the first incidence in Spain of the phenomenon that was later called the "hot autumn", although this term was actually first used to describe the events of the following year. After the summer vacation, the assemblies of the workers of FASA Renault of Valladolid and Seville made their debut, and the strikes in Barcelona and its vicinity continued unabated. In the county of Baix Llobregat the strikes led by the Workers Commissions had succeeded in diverting the struggles into legalist dead ends thanks to the tolerance and connivance of the bureaucrats of the regime, although they were unable to prevent the development of the assemblies, not even with the common maneuver of creating self-designated committees composed of members of the vertical trade unions and alleged "leaders". In the factories of Vallès, although the demobilizing impact of the Workers Commissions was a significant force, the assemblies and the strike committees elected by the assemblies continued to grow stronger. There were minority and "anti-capitalist" tendencies that defended the assemblies. In the Basque Country, the other focal point of working class unrest, an atmosphere of solidarity and combative fervor prevailed like never before; daily assemblies were held in Pasajes, Beasoain, Tolosa, Andoain, Irún, Sestao and Eibar, the momentary capitals of the proletariat. The bureaucrats of the vertical trade unions tried to mitigate the combativeness of the workers by regulating trade union rights in the workplaces by way of a decree and by elaborating a new law on labor agreements that went into effect in December. According to this law, should disagreements arise concerning the proposed contract, the parties must abide by "compulsory arbitration"; strikes were still prohibited, however, which was why no one expected the workers to pay much attention to this stipulation. To the employers, however, this decree seemed to go too far. They thought that it made intolerable concessions that undermined their power in the workplace and they accused the officials of the Franco regime who were responsible for this law of trying to compensate for the lack of political freedom with an increase in the rights of labor. Many employers had to ignore the new rules and negotiate directly with the Workers Commissions in order to prevent strikes. These employers advocated concerted negotiations with professional representatives of the labor force to establish contracts for whole industries, rather than negotiating factory by factory. Thus, by entering into relations with disciplined trade unionists they could spare themselves the trouble of dealing with the committees elected by the assemblies, which were all-too-prone to force them to agree to pay higher wages than the rates established by law. The Franco regime

could no longer guarantee the stability of labor relations that was nonetheless being offered to them by the semi-vertical trade unionism led by the CCOO. For the first time, a significant sector of Spanish capitalism was prepared to undergo political modernization by making political concessions to ensure order in labor affairs, something that would accentuate even more the class collaboration line of the PCE and the Workers Commissions.

The assassination of Carrero was used by the reactionary majority of the regime's supporters to bring a halt to modernization, temporarily suspend the "1001 Trial", and sentence Puig Antich, a member of the MIL, to death; Antich, ignored by the opposition, was executed on March 2, 1974. The radical trajectory of the proletariat was not at all diminished, however. The number of strikes tripled in 1974, many of them solidarity strikes. There were many more strikes in Spain, where they were prohibited, than in the rest of Europe, where they were legal. The workers displayed a high degree of combativity and acted with total disregard for official labor liaisons, scabs, forces of public order and informers. In certain milieus, one could pay a very high price for being conservative. In February, in Valencia, the workers movement came to life with the strike of the Unión Naval de Levante. For several years in Valencia, the arrests of militants, and agreements made outside of the framework of the trade unions between employers and workers — negotiated by law firms specializing in labor relations — had prevented the appearance of assemblies. Particular attention is merited by the strikes at Elsa and Solvay, in Baix, in July, for providing a before and after picture of the social struggle in Barcelona. The biggest factories in Catalonia were located in the county of Bajo Llobregat (Hospitalet, Cornellá, Martorell, Sant Boi, Sant Just, Sant Feliu, Gavá, El Prat, Molins...), but this county was also the region that was most deeply penetrated by the Workers Commissions. Baix was synonymous with reformism, the paradise of bureaucratic usurpers and manipulators, the lair of Stalinists. But their margin for maneuver was not very large and for this reason the solidarity with the workers who were fired at Elsa led to an assembly-based general strike. The PSUC, the Catalanian branch of the PCE, had to prove to the employers that it could control the workers, and thus display the "legal vocation" of the Workers Commissions. The Stalinists sought the support of the employers association to liberalize the regime; furthermore, their self-designated coordinating committees boycotted the general strikes. But they not only tried to obtain the support of the employers; there is evidence from this period of Stalinist claims that the workers respected the efforts of the forces of order, or that the armed police and the Civil Guard "are workers, too". With such a bewildering discourse, its demobilizing labors were not always easy. The

combative enthusiasm of the workers overflowed the legal framework, ridiculing the mediation of the vertical trade unions. The legal representatives of the latter, liaisons and certified negotiators, were forced to resign, or resigned voluntarily, rendering the assemblies necessary at least to elect new delegates. At SEAT, one of the fiefdoms of the Stalinists until the failed strike of 1973, elections were organized in workshop assemblies at the initiative of the workers of Workshop No. 5, the most combative. In Baix, the Stalinists had to accept the assembly delegates, but they created, with the agreement of the authorities, at least at the provincial level, an institution for mediation based on the CNS, the “*Intersindical*” [Inter-Trade Union Liaison Committee]. Supporters of the vertical trade unions and the leftists of the Workers Commissions collaborated in this institution, a sinister alliance, but they were unable to stop what came next: the general strike in Baix. In the Basque Country, the Stalinists of the Workers Commissions created a phantom coordinating committee, the CONE, which did not succeed in recruiting any members outside of the largest enterprises. The PCE always acted like this, fabricating leadership committees without bothering about the rank and file base that these committees were supposed to represent. On the other hand, however, the Workers Committees of Álava promoted a broadly representative Workers Coordinating Committee in Vitoria that was established in October. It was the first institution of its kind that advocated “all negotiating power to the assembly” and that only admitted elected and revocable delegates who were vested with no other prerogatives than “the imperative mandate of the assembly”. All the tendencies of the workers movement were represented in this Committee except the Stalinist Workers Commissions. In Guipúzcoa, Vizcaya and Navarre, despite the increasingly more numerous autonomous and Basque nationalist groups (such as the “Komiteaks” who had split from the Workers Front of the ETA, the groups that subsequently formed the LAB trade union, and the Commissions of Anti-capitalist Workers), the leftist parties (MC, ORT, LCR, OIC) still exercised a significant degree of influence on the workers movement. The product of the confluence of all these forces was the general strike of December 11, 1974, which was strictly social and political in nature. Although their only purpose was to replace the PCE in the “vanguard” of the movement, the leftists (Maoists and Trotskyists of every stripe) supported the assemblyist tendencies of the proletariat in order to outflank the communist “leadership” and take its place. The creation of the Coordinating Committee of Euskadi of Workers Commissions (CECO) in April of 1975 was part of this tactic of substitution. They soon became just as pernicious as those whom they sought to replace and returned to the fold to combat the assembly movement alongside the Stalinists.

The wave of repression continued unabated; in 1974, 5,000 workers were fired and 25,000 temporarily suspended for political reasons. The Tribunal of Public Order conducted about two thousand trials, affecting approximately 5,000 people, but in 1975 the world of labor was aflame; half of all labor contracts signed were imposed without the consent of the workers (in 1972, this figure was only 6.5%). The number of labor conflicts acknowledged by the authorities of the Franco regime amounted to 3,156, a thousand more than the previous year, affecting 650,000 workers. The year commenced with nothing less than a labor conflict at Potasas de Navarra which led to a week-long general strike in all of Pamplona. At the same time there was a general strike of the metal workers in Saragossa, which signaled the resumption of the workers movement in that city, which took two different directions: one reformist (that of the Inter-Industry Workers Commission); and the other assembly-based (that of the Autonomous Workers Commissions). Between December and January, due to an employers' lockout, the workers of SEAT of Barcelona held daily assemblies at the Plaza de Cataluña. Management, allied with the Workers Commissions, never admitted the legitimacy of the representatives of the committee elected by the assembly to engage in contract negotiations. The collaboration of the Workers Commissions with company management was so obvious that from then on negotiations concerning the contract were carried out exclusively between them alone; even so, the workers demanded and in many cases obtained the resignation of the trade union's certified liaisons. The strike ended with more than five hundred workers fired, but the CCOO never regained control over the factory. Between January and February, stage actors conducted a picturesque strike in Madrid. First, they held assemblies to elect a committee outside of the official channels to negotiate their contract. These assemblies resulted in arrests, and the arrests provoked the strike. On February 3 and 4 there was a general strike in Asturias and a long strike in the old factory of Duro-Felguera (Gijón), followed by the Firestone strike in April (Basauri), which lasted three months. The "anti-capitalist" platforms participated in this strike. Working class unrest in Barcelona was constant, but unlike the Basque Country, the assemblyist workers were in the minority. The assembly-based strike at Tabauto in Hospitalet, in the Stalinist fiefdom of Baix, was isolated and miserably sold out, like the SEAT strike. The workers, exhausted after five months of fighting alone, reached an agreement with the employer though the mediation of the vertical trade union for a return to work in June, accepting dozens of firings and disciplinary measures. The Stalinists advised them not to "provoke" the police with slogans and occupations, much less confront them directly, even going so far as to call upon the workers not to attend

demonstrations and to go on trips out of town instead. This did not have much of an impact, for in April the government proclaimed a state of emergency in Vizcaya and Guipúzcoa, and on May Day, while trying to disperse a demonstration, the police killed a worker in Vigo. There was a general strike in Ondarribia on June 11. The revolution of the “carnations” in Portugal was gradually beginning to have an effect on the Spanish proletariat. The Portuguese workers took advantage of the vacuum of power caused by a military coup to advance their own interests; with each passing day, there was news of strikes, occupations and soldiers’ movements. Unfortunately, the revolution collapsed at the end of 1975 and ceased to be a stimulating factor. The Spaniards did not have it as easy as the Portuguese, because the vacuum of power in the factories was filled by the Workers Commissions and the leftists who on many occasions assumed the repressive tasks of the bureaucracy of the vertical trade union. The industrial bourgeoisie lost confidence in the regime’s trade unions and in the judicial handling of labor conflicts; the workers had the support of independent labor lawyers and the verdicts of the judges were increasingly more favorable for the workers, which is why the latter, conscious of their strength, broke off contract negotiations on the slightest pretext. The practice of accumulating strike funds began to spread. And to top it all off, the government promulgated a decree on strikes on May 22 that was greeted with dismay by the employers association and the liberal government ministers. For the first time, the Franco regime recognized the right to strike, although with numerous restrictions. Furthermore, it expressly prohibited solidarity strikes and strikes that extended beyond the framework of a single enterprise. And, for the first time, it limited the employers’ right to engage in lockouts. It prohibited the employment of strikebreakers and the indiscriminate refusal to abide by the terms of labor contracts. The opposition, basically the PCE and the PSOE, was indifferent to this decree; it had established its institutions for political negotiations in order to form a bourgeois opposition to the regime, the Junta and the Platform, and did not cease to offer its services to the liberal employers and the disaffected former supporters of the Franco regime. This was why, beginning in 1974, the Workers Commissions opposed all actions that seriously disturbed the employers. Their goal was to become the sole valid interlocutor by displaying moderation when the moment came to resort to a strike, and to embed their organizations within the vertical trade unions. The trade union elections of June offered an opportunity to legally take them over and the Workers Commissions mobilized their militants, enrolled in “Unitary Democratic Slates”, to monopolize the trade union positions. If their purpose in 1971 was to destroy the CNS from within, as the communiqué of a spectral General Coordinating

Committee of Workers Commissions explained, now it was a question of becoming its masters. The affair of the elections divided the working class into two blocs: one conservative, pusillanimous, ready to obey the pseudo-coordinating committees and the old trade union bureaucrats [*bonzos*] who acted the part of “leaders”; the other radical, in favor of developing rank and file control and extending the struggles by way of assemblies and general strikes. In August and September there were demonstrations due to the fact that four Military Tribunals had sought death penalties for members of the ETA and FRAP. The Government confirmed five death sentences and on September 27, Txiki, Otaegui and three Maoists were executed. On September 29, there was a general strike in the Basque Country. The protests continued in October, while numerous factory assemblies debated the new contracts and elected delegates. The third Basque hot autumn led to the establishment of various coordinating committees that were opposed to the pro-vertical trade union line of the Workers Commissions, and which prepared the strike wave of December.

Franco died on November 20 and the Monarchy was proclaimed, whose first government was presided over by Carrero’s successor, Arias Navarro. Closely associated with the extreme right, he was kept in his position in order to counteract the allegedly reformist efforts of the executive branch. A conditional pardon lifted restrictions on the freedom of those affected by the “1001 Trial” and removed any remaining impediments to the Stalinist plan to create a contingent of “leaders” of the Workers Commissions. The situation of revolt in the factories had forced a rapprochement between the employers, the vertical trade unions, the reformist elements of the Franco regime and the opposition, but it did not lead to any tangible results. The economic crisis was now added to the permanent political crisis. It marked the end of the Franco regime’s model of economic development based on a national industry led by a partnership of the seven big banks. The crisis was the consequence of the oil price hikes of 1973. In Spain, with an economy that was dependent on hydrocarbons, the crisis began to have an effect in 1974. The State thought that the crisis was temporary and subsidized fuel prices, which emptied its coffers. The balance of payments deficit grew, industrial expansion came to an end, and new foreign investment ceased. Due to competition from other countries that had also developed their national industries, in some productive sectors (steel, shipbuilding, textiles) there was overproduction. The strike wave prevented the implementation of a policy of adjustment, since contracts were frequently signed that exceeded the maximum wage increases stipulated by the government, and the capitalists reacted to their losses by raising prices — in 1974, the rate of inflation was 20%—with layoffs, which began to be a significant

factor at the time, and with capital flight. Numerous enterprises declared bankruptcy. The Arias government then sought to rein in the workers by intimidating them, promulgating in December a wage freeze decree that unleashed the largest strike movement in the history of Spain.

At the end of 1975 there was a qualitative extension of class consciousness whose effects were immediately apparent. Throughout 1976 there were more than 40,000 strikes involving approximately three million workers. There were whole provinces, like Barcelona, where half the labor force was on strike at one time or another. The most outstanding aspect of this strike wave was the fact that its forms of struggle were based on a generalized system of assemblies, which eventually forced the numerous enemies of the assemblies to join them in order to liquidate them. It all began in Madrid, when the employers, sheltering behind the pretext of the wage freeze decree, refused to negotiate any new contracts, which immediately resulted in strikes. First, the factories on the highway to Toledo were shut down, especially those affected by the metal workers' contract. The center of the movement was the Intelsa factory, in Getafe, whose victorious workshop, general and delegate assemblies were able to extend the range of their influence through the intelligent use of pickets. The strikers had to confront not only the employers, but also the vertical trade union apparatus supported by the Workers Commissions for whom all decision-making powers must belong to the official liaisons and certified representatives of the vertical trade unions and to the self-appointed strike committees of the CNS. In January of 1976 the strikes spread to the whole industrial belt of Madrid, and to all the towns on all the major national highways: Getafe, Villaverde, Leganés, Pinto, Fuenlabrada, Móstoles, Coslada, Parla, Torrejón, San Fernando, Alcalá de Henares, Vallecas, Alcobendas, San Sebastián de los Reyes, etc. A total of 800,000 workers participated in the strikes and wage increases approached 40%, although they were considerably undermined by the devaluation of the peseta. In some factories, the high rate of abstention in previous trade union elections favored the appearance of managing commissions and strike committees elected directly by the assemblies; in others, the dynamic of the struggle itself overflowed the framework of the structures of the vertical trade unions and imposed direct democracy. The immense majority of the delegates did not belong to any party or trade union. The movement penetrated the city of Madrid with the strike of the Metro workers, which was followed by strikes in the construction, banking, telecommunications, postal, insurance, education and rail sectors, until a general strike was underway without anyone having proclaimed it. The Metro and the postal service were taken over by the military. The plans of the PCE did not involve a war of attrition against the system, but rather forcing it to make a political deal, which is why it tried to cause

the criterion of negotiation to prevail over that of popular mobilization. Its control over the proletariat was its best, and indeed its only, bargaining chip. Supported by the leftist parties and by its allies “within” the bureaucracy of the vertical trade unions, the Stalinists tried to convert the regime’s trade union organization into the apparatus for regimenting the whole working class, but the development of working class assembly democracy exploded the framework of the vertical trade unions and ruined their plans. As a result, they had no scruples about dissolving the Inter-Trade Union Strike Committee, formed after the work stoppage on the Metro, when the Committee decided to enlarge its membership to include delegates elected by the assemblies. Nor did they have any scruples about liquidating the strike in the construction industry when workers were still being fired and arrested. In general, they did everything they could to prevent the strikes from leading to the formation of specifically working class institutions of power, so that they did not become a revolutionary movement for socialization, and instead depicted the movement as a “movement for civil liberties”. They tried to make the workers movement repudiate its class content and adopt a bourgeois language like that of the PCE, the Workers Commissions and the PSOE. The socialists, only recently having organized their party, and enjoying abundant financing from the German social democratic party, proposed that the direct representation of the workers should be replaced by trade union committees composed of representatives of the UGT, the USO and the CCOO. They were the first to understand the need for a united front against the proletariat, because the task of neutralizing it exceeded the capacities of any single party.

Unrelated to what was transpiring in Madrid, on November 11, 1975 a labor conflict broke out at the Laforsa factory in Baix Llobregat. A worker was fired for shouting at a foreman and his comrades walked out in solidarity with him, which in turn led to more workers being fired. The workers went from one factory to another explaining the situation until they decided to occupy a church. Workers at various other enterprises held assemblies to address the issue and on January 13 a large crowd of workers assembled in the vicinity of the occupied church. The police violently attacked the crowd and severely injured one person. In response, several enterprises went on strike, more workers were fired and finally the working class of Baix proclaimed the general strike, the third in its history. The militants of the Workers Commissions faced a serious problem. They were against the strike but they could not totally turn their backs on it. They set to work in earnest in the county assemblies to ensure that the demonstrations were small and did not have self-defense pickets. Two leadership groups acted in parallel: the assemblies and the Inter-Trade Union Committee [*Intersindical*]. The latter appointed a Workers Negotiating

Commission for the purpose of obtaining interviews with the civil governor, a recently-converted “democrat”, and with a commission appointed by the employers’ association of Baix. The workers’ demonstrations failed to have any effect. They could not join forces and, without defensive preparations, they were easily dispersed. The Stalinists succeeded in obtaining their interviews. The strike was now without any basis and was therefore unilaterally called off on the 28th of January, leaving unresolved the matters of the fired workers and their demands. The workers were confused and defeated, having paid the price for trusting such abject “leaders” and their hardly recommendable fellow travelers, yet the strike movement did not come to an end, but crossed over to the other side of Barcelona. The brutal repression of a demonstration of teachers, parents and schoolchildren in Sabadell gave rise to a general strike in the Vallès, extended by a strike at the Bultaco plant and in the chemical, education and construction sectors, which affected such towns as Vic, Tarrasa and Badalona. The resort to shop-floor, section or district delegates illustrated the total bankruptcy of the “unitary democratic slates”, although the innocence of the workers with respect to the Stalinists gave much leeway to their maneuvers. No radical autonomous current crystallized in order to provide even a small degree of strategic clarity to the working class, and this despite the existence of numerous autonomous groups and of a climate that was favorable for self-organization. The confused situation could not be resolved to the benefit of workers autonomy, and facilitated the repressive work of the parties and trade unions. This incipient bureaucracy sought a legal framework to institutionalize its existence, in order to thus put an end to any possibility for working class self-organization, but the forces that could have conceded this legality were too divided among themselves with respect to the degree and the magnitude of the concessions. In January and February assembly-based strikes broke out all over the Peninsula, mostly in the construction industry: in Tarragona, Valencia, Cordoba, Seville, Cadiz, Vigo, Cartagena, Badajoz, Asturias, Navarre.... The conflict at the Astano shipyards (El Ferrol) lasted a whole year. On February 24, during the demonstrations for the shoe industry labor contract, the police killed a young worker in Elda (Alicante). In Valladolid, a strike broke out in the construction sector on January 22. The workers met in a general assembly, elected a Representative Commission and demanded the resignation of the certified trade union liaisons. Various factories took advantage of the occasion to pose their own demands and to elect their own Representative Commissions. On February 3, an assembly of delegates composed of Representative Commissions and members of the assembly of unemployed workers was convened. The employers’ association used a trick to defeat them: it accepted

without any discussion the wage hikes that were demanded in order to force a return to work and left the combative workers isolated, most of whom were then fired. Thus, the economic success of the strike signaled the weakening of the workers movement at a crucial moment and in a key zone.

In Vizcaya the strike movement began in December of 1975, in two bargaining units that worked for the nuclear power plant at Lemoniz. The work stoppage spread to other bargaining units and from the latter to the big factories on the Nervión River, most notably Altos Hornos de Vizcaya. Two forms of struggle arose; on the one hand, that of the bargaining units, through strike committees elected in assemblies, which merged into a single strike committee. On the other hand, in the big factories, where the influence of the two currents of the Workers Commissions or the UGT was strong, through the resort to the legally certified representatives and the vertical trade unions. There were no strike committees, assemblies or joint platforms for demands in the latter; furthermore, all attempts to form a coordinating body, a "central strike committee", were aborted. In Álava it was different. The Forjas Alavesas plant went on strike on January 9 and was followed by another ten metal-working factories. As in Valladolid, the workers held assemblies to elect their Representative Commissions and demanded the resignation of the legal trade union liaisons and certified representatives. Later, they unified their demands, which were similar to those of the other strikers in Spain: abolition of wage ceilings; negotiation with the real representatives of the assemblies; and an end to firings and arrests. The last point was the most important, insofar as a momentary victory could entail certain defeat in the future if reprisals were not taken into account, that is, if the solidarity of the workers was broken, the strong point and at the same time the Achilles Heel of the proletariat. The Workers Coordinating Committee of Vitoria became the Coordinating Committee of Representative Commissions, an authentic workers council. The struggle took place amidst constant assemblies until, faced with the refusal of the employers to recognize the representative commissions, the workers took to the streets. Some enterprises then ended up recognizing the workers delegates while others denounced them to the police. In mid-February, there was a general strike that succeeded in obtaining the release of the arrested workers. Another mobilization in favor of the workers who had been fired was less successful and then the assemblies decided to call a third general strike for March 3. The day dawned with the whole city shut down. When the workers marched to the Church of Saint Francis, in the Zaramaga district, the police launched a fierce attack against them, beating people in the crowd and firing tear gas canisters. Then the police received the order to shoot to kill, and as a result four workers were left dead and more than one hundred wounded with bullet wounds, one of whom

died shortly thereafter. While the entire working class was overcome with shock, the police reestablished control over Vitoria. On March 8 the general strike was declared in the Basque Country and Navarre. In another region where representative commissions had arisen, Basauri, the police killed another worker. The Government, headed by Prime Minister Fraga, eager to put an end to the “soviet” of Vitoria and to the “anarchy” in the factories, expressly prohibited every kind of meeting and proceeded to arrest the most prominent workers in the assemblies. The intelligence services of the State and the Army were convinced that a proletarian insurrection was only hours away. With all of Euskadi [the “Basque Country”] paralyzed and in a state of extreme tension, the time was ripe for calling the general strike in all of Spain, but the workers of Vitoria, exhausted and disoriented by the repression, preferred to return to work beginning on March 14, leaving their best comrades in jail, accused of sedition and therefore in the hands of the military justice system.

The Stalinists had a better grasp of the pre-revolutionary nature of the situation than the workers themselves and devoted themselves body and soul to defusing it. The first step was the unification of the central political institutions of the PCE, the PSOE and the Christian Democrats, the Junta and the Platform, in a Democratic Coordinating Committee, which was also joined by the leftist parties. At the same time, they renounced any intention to radically transform the fascist corporative structures and in April created the Coordinating Committee of Trade Union Organizations [*Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sindicales* — COS], in accordance with the UGT’s February proposal, whose purpose was to wage a merciless war against assembly democracy. For its part, the Government was convinced that the absence of any participation on the part of the illegal trade unions and the opposition parties was even worse for capitalist interests, but pressure from the Army, the other essential pillar of capitalism, which began after the events in Vitoria, prevented this necessary convergence. The opposition responded on March 29 with a manifesto that rejected the government’s proposed political reforms. It was a simple invitation to make the reforms more meaningful. The shrewdness of the Arias government and the opposition in their mutual relations cannot be denied: on April 8 the Law of Labor Relations was promulgated, which mandated the 44-hour working week, with Saturday afternoons off and 25 paid vacation days per year, demands which had already been achieved by many of the ongoing labor struggles. The law had nothing to say about “the right of assembly” demanded by thousands of strikers. Its concessions were the least that could be done given the circumstances; but the article referring to the prohibition of firing workers for political reasons, responsible for so many solidarity strikes, aroused the ire of the employers, who saw themselves deprived

of the most effective weapon against strikes, which, despite the deaths in Vitoria, continued unabated. In order to retake the streets the Government had to once again declare a state of emergency, which did not seem to bother the opposition very much, which was now very deeply entrenched in its repressive role. In early May, Fraga, the Prime Minister, met with Felipe González, the secretary of the PSOE, and the Government approved Martín Villa's proposal of trade union reform in accordance with the principles of the OIT [International Labor Organization — ILO], which opened up the door to "free" trade unionism. The regime's toleration of the COS was blatant, for while the workers participating in the assemblies were stigmatized as provocateurs by COS militants and persecuted by the police, that same month the "clandestine" UGT held a reconstruction congress without any attempt at concealment, authorized by Fraga, the very same person who had given the order to open fire on the workers of Vitoria. During the next few months the arrested demonstrators who did not possess trade union cards were preferentially held in custody. For their part, certain sectors of the Workers Commissions controlled by leftist parties were submitting to Stalinist discipline (in June, the CONE and the CECO merged; shortly before, the "Sectors" of BR had submitted to the authority of the National Workers Commission of Catalonia), while others split from the Stalinists: on July 11, during the general assembly of Workers Commissions in Barcelona, when it definitively proclaimed its intention to form a separate trade union instead of merging with the central organs of the CCOO, the UGT and the USO, the tendency that would subsequently form the Unitary Trade Unions split from the COS.

The political situation satisfied no one. The movement of December-March, rejecting the idea that the cost of the economy's failures should fall upon the shoulders of the workers, and upholding the direct democracy of the assemblies, had gone beyond both the dictatorship and the opposition, putting both of them on the same side of the barricade. Not only were the remnants of the old Franco regime incapable of allowing themselves the luxury of an opposition, but the opposition could not allow itself the luxury of fighting against the reforms proposed by the Franco regime. Carrillo, secretary of the PCE, now spoke of an "agreed break". The opposition, and particularly the PCE, understood that while the central power was incapable of winning the recognition of the working class masses, the PCE was itself capable of winning their recognition as an interlocutor with the Franco regime's apparatus. The international environment was favorable; the United States remained neutral. Just then, the opposition publicly proclaimed that it was on the side of order. It was necessary to fill the gaps created by the vacuum of power in the factories and the streets. The old regime, however, was in such a state of political decomposition that it

was incapable of taking even one more step in the direction that it was heading. On June 1, Arias Navarro resigned and the failed reformers were isolated. He was replaced by the last leader of Franco's Movement, Adolfo Suárez, an obscure functionary without any noteworthy pedigree. Those who selected him — it is said that he relied on the support of the financiers — assigned him the mission to create "a new democratic framework" for the strikes and avoid economic collapse. Suárez formed a government with a reformist in the background, Osorio, and with his friends, the Catholics of the ACNP. Without any apparent biases, this government began where the previous reformers had failed: by opening up a dialogue with the opposition. It maintained a series of contacts with the socialists, with the Catalanian nationalists and, through intermediaries, with the communists. On July 30 an amnesty was proclaimed that did not free all the prisoners, nor did it provide guarantees for the return of the exiles, but which allowed the leaders of the opposition to appear in public. The ordinary prisoners, entirely excluded, rioted. In August, the government's Minister of Trade Union Relations spoke with the leaders of the UGT, the USO and the CCOO. He promised all of them freedom for the trade unions, a labor amnesty and the transfer of the patrimony of the CNS. The decomposition of the vertical trade union was accelerated and its useful bureaucrats were shared out among the UGT, the USO and the Commissions. The meetings continued in September, and ensured that the opposition compromised its credibility among the working class masses by fighting against the strikes and protests. The hostility of the army was the most convincing argument offered by the reformist elements of the old regime to dissuade the opposition from choosing any other option. As a result, the legalization of the parties was a *fait accompli*, although the reticence of the military made it advisable to postpone the legalization of the PCE, which the Stalinists accepted.

In the barracks there was a certain amount of unrest among the troops, but there was not enough agitation, although the commanding officers saw conspiracies everywhere and increased their vigilance. Suárez counted on the invaluable help of Carrillo, who, through the mediation of the lawyer, José Mario Armero, sincerely offered his party's assistance in the fight against wage struggles and the task of demobilizing the strike movement. Nor was this assistance a trivial matter, for it was feared that there would be a repetition that upcoming autumn of the strike movement of the beginning of the year. The usual practice consisted in allowing the assemblies to be held while capturing the negotiating commission, and thus, the whole working class democratic system of decision-making could be destroyed all at once from a commission that was answerable to no one. This is what happened in the strike of the

construction workers of León that took place in September, which spread to La Coruña and Burgos. In other conflicts involving more experienced workers, the trade unionists were expelled from the factories and jobsites by saboteurs and then the police were set to work in earnest. The exacerbation of the repression directed against the workers was a prominent feature of the first stage of the Suárez government, a selective repression, clearly aimed at the assemblies and their most active members, taking care to give the trade unionists a wide berth. On September 9 the mining basin of Asturias was shut down by a strike. On September 12, the small metal workshops of Sabadell went on strike. This time the workers, who in their immense majority did not belong to any trade union, faced an employers' lockout and mass firings, the prohibition of the assemblies and the open opposition of the CCOO to pickets and the general strike. In addition, the COS kept the big metal factories out of the conflict (SEAT, Pegaso, Hispano-Olivetti...). Torpedoed by the "leaders" of the Commissions that dominated the deliberating committee, the workers of the sector of small metal-working enterprises held a daily assembly attended by large crowds in the church of Can Oriac, until the unprecedented violence of the police crushed the spirit of the strikers. After two days of activities, the strike ended on October 12 and resulted in a defeat for the advocates of the assemblies that would have profound consequences. 450 fired workers were thrown onto the streets. On September 21, the police killed a student at the door of his home in Santa Cruz de Tenerife, which unleashed a general strike and a violent demonstration on the day of his burial. On September 22, the third postal workers strike began in Madrid, which one week later spread to 34 provinces and to the Telegraph sector. Because of the death of a student on October 1, also in Madrid, there was a day of militant demonstrations attended by more than two hundred thousand strikers. On October 8 the police shot a young man in Fuenterrabía and in response a general strike was declared in Vizcaya, which on the 13th spread to all of Euskadi. Because the assemblies were behind the struggle, the authorities prohibited them and the COS opposed their decisions. The unitary institution that led the struggle, the Coordinating Committee of the Factories of Vizcaya, was far from being the voice of the assemblies; it was instead the playing field of the struggle between the leftist parties and the PCE and the COS. The former were trying to seize control of the struggle to reconstruct their own trade union, since the unification of the CCOO had failed, while the latter were simply trying to put an end to the struggle. Amidst all these machinations, the few assembly delegates were powerless to impose at the highest levels the dynamic of the rank and file and convert the Coordinating Committee of the Factories into a real Coordinating Committee of Representatives, that is, a Workers Council.

Nonetheless, they managed to coordinate the activities of about one hundred factories. It was the high point of councilism; everything went downhill after that. The PCE thought that the workers had provoked the Government with their strikes and were an impediment to dialogue, but it could not remain totally separate from them if it did not want to lose all its influence, which was the only thing it had that made it a viable negotiating partner. It could not prevent the Coordinating Committee from calling a general strike in Euskadi on September 27 for a total amnesty and to commemorate the executions of Txiki and the other four anti-fascists. In revenge, the Government suspended the article referring to workers fired for labor activism in the law passed in April, to the satisfaction of the employers. Between October and November the construction workers strike took place in Vizcaya, conducted by a real system of assemblies. Since the COS could not liquidate it, the Government prohibited all meetings, and thereby succeeded in isolating the Managing Commission, which was incapable of accounting for its activities to a general assembly that could not be convoked. This coordinated division of the labor of repression between the COS and the Suárez government functioned quite well, preventing conflicts from spreading like wildfire. For example, the strike of the EMT in Madrid was simultaneously broken by the trade unions and militarized by the Government. The compromise worked; on October 7 the Democratic Coordinating Committee, or the "Platajunta", which in August had declared its willingness to arrange a "a negotiated break" with the government, broke with the leftist parties and formed a Negotiating Commission to draft a plan for governmental reform. The opposition thought that it was necessary to embark on a radical change of course for labor peace, which is still its "specialty". There were alarming symptoms that indicated that the energies of the workers might converge towards an assembly-based strike movement. Thus, for the purpose of preventing it from concentrating its power all at once, the COS called for a day of struggle on November 12 "against the economic policies of the Government". The appeal was only heeded in part (two and a half million workers participated), which led Suárez to congratulate himself on the fact that the power of the opposition was relative, while the opposition could express its satisfaction at having a more disciplined mass of workers than it had predicted. We do not need to point out, of course, that the Government's economic policies, which were used by the opposition as a mere pretext, followed their course. The radical workers did not seize the initiative, neither in the resistance nor with respect to taking the next step forward. At these levels no stable coordinating committees had been established and they were far from having elaborated a revolutionary alternative that would learn from the experiences of

the assemblies and transform them into a practical force. Properly instructed, on November 18, the legislature of the Franco regime passed the "Law for Political Reform" proposed by the Government. Meanwhile, now that the Democratic Coordinating Committee was defunct, the plot was underway to integrate the opposition. The referendum on the law was a major victory for Suárez; three months later the trade unions were legalized and general elections were scheduled. With the workers movement in retreat, the COS, the trade union front against the assemblies, had fulfilled its mission and it was not long before it dissolved.

The demonstrations of November 12 broke the back of the assembly movement, facilitating the mutually agreed-upon reform between the opposition and the government. The opposition renounced the strike as a political weapon, but used those it could not stop as a weapon against workers autonomy. The dissolving action of the repression, the firings and the political-trade union maneuvers succeeded in disorienting the workers. The latter, who were still capable of seeing clearly, attached themselves to what was safe, to material demands and employment, and avoided committing to making a choice between putting an end to capitalism or helping modernize it. Their immediate material interests were separated from their class interests; this favored the development of trade unionism, forced them to neglect the question of self-defense and caused them to ignore the barracks. During this time of decomposition the Army, due to a lack of discipline among the troops, was of fundamental importance, but it was a task that would have required the domination of the workers on the streets. The workers returned to work, which was not so bad, and shut themselves up in their homes, in their private lives, which was bad; the discouragement spread among the workers committees and autonomous groups, which tried to launch parties in favor of autonomy, or else they dissolved or joined trade unions (many of them participated in the LAB or in the reconstruction of the CNT); the assemblies declined in number and the coordinating committees languished. But workers autonomy would have one more great moment with l'Assemblea de Treballadors de l'Espectacle, the Roca strike, the formation of the Factory Council at SEAT, the Assembly Movement of the shoe industry in Elche and the occupation of Cadiz by the demonstrations of the Workers Coordinating Committees, but no current on any significant scale that could work on its behalf was capable of taking shape. While it is true that the movement did not end immediately, it nonetheless lost its capacity for self-organization and went into decline. Time was not on its side. The workers collectives that had preserved the assembly mechanism were isolated, on the defensive. Assemblies of soldiers were never formed, and

revolutionary options, dependent on the independent development of the proletariat and on the dissolution of the military apparatus, were gradually losing all opportunities for success, even partial success, until they totally evaporated during the next four or five years.

Miguel Amorós.

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Leninism, a fascist ideology

“Liberation! It is remarkable how persistent human criminal instincts are! I use deliberately the word ‘criminal’, for freedom and crime are as closely related as – well, as the movement of an airplane and its speed: if the speed of an airplane equals zero, the airplane is motionless; if human liberty is equal to zero, man does not commit any crime. That is clear. The way to rid man of criminality is to rid him of freedom.”
Yevgeny Zamyatin, *We*, 1920.

Today, the existence of more or less virtual immobilist sects that proclaim their loyalty to Lenin is more related to the neuroses that haunt individuals immersed in the modern conditions of capitalism, than it is to the war of ideas waged by rebels against the ideologists of the ruling class. Time is not forgiving, and the final collapse of Leninism that took place between 1976 and 1980 has caused those true believers who still exist to live in a state of schizoid survival. As Gabel has already pointed out, the price they pay for their faith is a split consciousness, a kind of double personality. On the one hand, reality refutes their dogma right down to its smallest details, and, on the other hand, the militants’ interpretation must distort, constrain and manipulate reality to the point of delirium in order to make it conform to their dogma and to manufacture a Manichaean fairy tale without any contradictions. As if it was a Bible study class, the fairy tale has all the answers. The Leninist fairy tale overcomes the anxiety engendered in the believer by the contradictions that arise from practice, and constitutes a powerful means of escaping from reality. The result would be merely pathetic as far as the rest of us were concerned if the debates that once flourished among a combative proletariat like that of the sixties were taking place today, but given the current state of class consciousness, or, which amounts to the same thing, given the spectacular inversion of reality, where “the true is only a moment of the false”, the presence of Leninist sectarians in the few rank and file discussions that are taking place today only contributes to the reigning confusion.

The objective role of the sects consists in the falsification of history, the concealment of reality, distracting attention away from real problems, sabotaging reflection on the causes of the capitalist victory, obstructing the formulation of adequate tactics of struggle, and, finally, preventing the theoretical rearmament of the oppressed. The fossilized Leninists of our time

are no longer (not being capable of such a thing) the vanguard of the counterrevolution that their predecessors were thirty or even sixty years ago, but their function is still the same: to work for domination as agents provocateurs.

Given the current decomposition of the Leninist ideology it might be more fitting to speak of “Leninisms”, but rather than lose ourselves in the nuances that separate the various sects we shall attempt to set forth their shared characteristics, the ones that most clearly define all of them, that is, their resolute denial that a workers revolution took place in 1936, and the equally steadfast assertion of the existence of an always-advancing working class and the belief in the advent of the leading party, the guide of the workers on their march to revolution. The first trait was bequeathed to them either by the defeatist and capitulationist analyses of the Belgian journal, *Bilan*, or by the triumphalist dictates of the Komintern and the Communist Party of Spain. Whereas the former considered it an imperialist war, the latter considered it a war of independence; in both, the proletariat had to allow itself to be crushed.

In the Leninist universe, Lenin is the Virgin Mary; the working class that his devotees talk about plays the role of Christianity. A Shi’ite of Leninism, that is, a Bordiguist, complains on the internet: “If you take away the working class, what is left to us?” In effect, the working class has a ritual, therapeutic or, if you prefer, psychological function for the Leninists. It is an ideal entity, an abstraction, in the name of which power must be seized. The problem, however, is not just that it does not exist; it has never existed. Invented by Lenin on the basis of the Russian model of 1917, a minority working class in a feudal country with an overwhelmingly peasant population that was amenable to an external leadership composed of intellectuals organized into a party, is not exactly something you see every day. It belongs to a dead past. It is an anti-historical, utopian ideal. No kidding: the “Posadista” Trotskyist sect believed that it was located among the extraterrestrials of a distant galaxy, and that these extraterrestrials sent flying saucers to Earth with socialist messages. The messages of the UFOs must have been spread far and wide because the Leninist proletariat is found in every planetary soup; according to the Leninist press its epiphany could take place at any moment, in the civil war in Iraq, for example, or in the demonstrations of the French students, or in the formation of a “leftist” trade union federation, although most often it is thought to be expressed in labor struggles.

Since there is no history for Leninism after the storming of the Winter Palace, it would seem that since the Russian Revolution there have been neither

significant defeats nor significant victories; at most there have been minor setbacks along the course of an otherwise unswerving evolutionary line that leads to a pure working class, one that awaits the priests of the church, their leaders, the rightful members of the “party”. For the real historical subject of the Leninists is not the class but the party. The party is the absolute criterion of truth, which does not exist by itself but only within the party, in the correctly interpreted sacred scriptures. Within the party, salvation; outside the party, eternal damnation. This hallucinatory vanguardism is the most anti-proletarian feature of Leninism, for the idea of the one messianic party is foreign to Marx; it comes from the Masonic and *Carbonari* bourgeoisie. For Marx the party was the whole ensemble of forces that are fighting for the self-organization of the working class, and not just an authoritarian, enlightened, exclusive and hierarchical organization.

It is very revealing that the Leninists now see particular economic interests as class interests, when they are no longer class interests, while, during the 1970s, when they were class interests, they treated them as trade union affairs. The difference lies in the fact that in the 1970s the proletariat was fighting in its own way, with its own weapons, the assemblies. This is what transformed partial demands into class demands. But Leninists despise the really proletarian forms of struggle and of organization: the assemblies, the elected and revocable committees, the imperative mandate, self-defense, *coordinadoras*, councils.... They despise them because, as forms of workers power, they ignore the parties and dissolve the State, even the “proletarian” State. This is why the Leninists were just as careful as the mainstream media to conceal the existence of the Assembly Movement during the 1970s, because they are the enemies of a real working class that in no respect resembles the one they imagine, and they hate its specific organizational forms for obvious reasons. Unlike Marx, for Leninists existence does not determine consciousness, because the latter has to be inculcated by way of the apostolic ministry of leaders. According to Lenin, the workers cannot attain any more than a trade unionist consciousness and they must submit to playing the role of simple executors; the trade unions that regiment and control them are therefore the transmission belts of the party. This does not prevent the Leninists from praising the assemblies and the councils if this allows them to exercise some influence and to recruit some disciples. During the 1970s they even supported these institutions but as soon as they felt themselves strong enough they betrayed them, just as Lenin did, *mutatis mutandis*, with the Soviets.

The journal *Living Marxism*, edited by Paul Mattick, expounded the slogan, “the struggle against fascism begins with the struggle against Bolshevism”.

During the 1950s managerial capitalism evolved towards the totalitarian modes of Soviet State Capitalism. Today, when the communist bureaucratic class has converted to capitalism and the world is being dragged towards fascist domination by the technological road, Leninist ideology is a leftover, dusty museum piece. It does not study capitalism because capitalism is not its enemy; of course it does not want to fight against it. It just makes like garlic, and “repeats”. The principle labors of each sect consist in competing with the other sects by emphasizing “... the *particular shibboleth* which *distinguishes* it from” the class movement (Marx).

The theoretical battle against the Leninists is therefore no major undertaking, something like kicking a zombie, but insofar as Leninism constitutes the basic framework of the new ideologies of the counterrevolution, such as Hardt-Negrism, this battle should not be entirely neglected, and it is with this purpose in mind that we shall recall a few basic banalities concerning Leninism that anyone can find in the works of Rosa Luxemburg, Karl Korsch, the councilists (Pannekoek, Gorter, Rühle) or the anarchists (Rocker, Voline, Arshinov). Leninism, by way of Negri and his followers, as was previously the case with Stalinism, its most extreme form, is undergoing a complete return to the thought and the practice of the bourgeoisie, concretely displayed in the totalitarian stage of globalization, as manifested in its defense of parliamentarism, political compromise, the cell phone and spectacular movements. Negrism is ideologically based upon the weak and losing fractions of domination, the administrative political bureaucracy, the trade union apparatus and the middle classes, who are interested in upholding capitalism with State intervention. But Leninism has not changed. It has always defended interests contrary to those of the proletariat.

In the Russia of 1905 there was no bourgeoisie capable of leading the struggle against Czarism and the church as a future ruling class. This mission had to be assumed by the Russian intellectuals, who sought to clarify their nationalist impulses in Marxism and found their best allies among the working class. Russian Marxism assumed a completely different form than Orthodox Marxism, since in Russia the historical task that had to be fulfilled was that of a bourgeoisie that was too weak to carry it out: the abolition of absolutism and the construction of a national capitalism. Marx’s theory, as adapted by Kautsky and Bernstein, identified the revolution with the development of the productive forces and of the corresponding democratic State, and favored a reformist praxis that, although appropriate for Germany, was not at all appropriate for Russia.

Although Lenin integrally accepted the social democratic revision of Marx, he knew that the mission of the Bolshevik social democrats to overthrow Czarism could only be fulfilled by means of revolution, and greater forces than those of the Russian liberals were needed for such a revolution to succeed. A bourgeois revolution without the bourgeoisie, and even against the bourgeoisie. The workers revolt of 1905 left the absolutist regime badly wounded and the revolution of February 1917 finished it off. Although the latter was a workers and peasants insurrection it did not have a revolutionary program or explicit slogans, which is why the representatives of the bourgeoisie took their place. The bourgeoisie, however, could not rise to the occasion, while the proletariat was politically educated and conscious of its goals; soon, the revolution lost its bourgeois character and adopted a decidedly proletarian air. During July-August, 1917, Lenin was still advocating a bourgeois regime with workers participation, but seeing the progress made by the Soviets or workers councils, he changed his mind and proclaimed the slogan of 'all power to the Soviets', and even wrote a theoretical work on the extinction of the State. But the idea of horizontal power was foreign to Lenin, who had organized a party on the vertical, centralized model of the bourgeois military, with orders always being given from above, with the leadership and the rank and file clearly separated. If he was in favor of the Soviets, it was only for the purpose of using them to seize power. His primary goal was not the development of the Soviets, which had no place in his system; it was instead the conversion of the Bolshevik party into a bureaucratic state apparatus, and the introduction of bourgeois authoritarianism into the army and the power structure. As for the Soviets, the protagonists of the October Revolution, their power was soon usurped by a "proletarian" State they did not know how to destroy. In the name of "the dictatorship of the proletariat", the Bolsheviks fought workers control and the spread of the revolution to the workshops and factories, and generally any sovereign manifestation of workers' initiative in institutions characterized by direct democracy. In 1920 they put an end to the proletarian revolution and the soviets were no longer anything but castrated and decorative bodies. Later, the last strongholds of the revolution, the sailors of Kronstadt and the Makhnovist army, were annihilated.

At the same time that the Bolsheviks were destroying the Soviets, the Bolshevik emissaries arrived in Germany, where councils were being formed by the working class, councils that were on the verge of becoming effective institutions of proletarian power, in order to deliver a stab in the back to the revolution. Wherever they went they discredited the slogan of Workers Councils and advocated a return to the corrupt trade unions and the social

democratic party. The German council revolution collapsed under the pressure of the calumny, intrigue and isolation that resulted from the activities of the Bolsheviks. Upon its ruins the old social democracy and the postwar German State would rise, with Lenin's blessing. Lenin did not hesitate to fight the defenders of the council system by heaping them with insults in his followers' favorite pamphlet, *Left Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder*. In this text, he took off his disguise. Smothering the left communists and the councils under an avalanche of false accusations, Lenin defended his All-Russian pseudo-socialism, whose further elaboration by Stalin would reveal it to be a new kind of fascism. He was utterly incapable of perceiving that the liberation of the oppressed can only be achieved by way of the destruction of power, terror, fear, threats, and constraints.



Leninism – Clifford Harper

One could not imagine better preconditions for the establishment of a bourgeois order than the absolute separation of masses and leaders, class and vanguard, party and trade unions. Lenin sought to bring about a bourgeois revolution in Russia and formed a party that was perfectly fitted to that task, but the Russian revolution took on a working class character and spoiled his plans. Lenin had to use the Soviets to achieve victory so that he could later destroy them. Communism plus electrification gave way to the NEP and Stalin's Five

Year Plans, thus inaugurating a new form of capitalism where a new class, the bureaucracy, played the role of the bourgeoisie. It was State Capitalism. In Europe, the working class was stifled, discouraged and led to one defeat after another until it was demoralized and lost faith in its own slogans, a path that would lead to its submission to Nazism. Hitler seized power so easily because the social democratic and Stalinist leaders had so corrupted the German proletariat that the latter did not hesitate to surrender without a fight. "Brown Fascism, Red Fascism" was the title of a memorable pamphlet in which Otto Rühle demonstrates that the Stalinist fascism of yesterday was simply the Leninism of the day before yesterday. His essay was the inspiration for the title of this article.

The parallels that can be drawn with respect to the Spanish situation in 1970-1978 are obvious. On the one hand, the official Stalinist communist party advocated an alliance with sectors of the ruling class to force a democratic conversion of the Francoist regime. Its power derived principally from its manipulation of the workers movement, which it attempted to enroll in the fascist trade union apparatus. All the Leninist methods to prevent workers self-organization were faithfully practiced by the Spanish Communist Party. The left wing parties, which emerged for the most part from the disintegration of the FLP and splits from the PCE and the Workers Front of the ETA, did the same thing. All of them attacked the PCE for not being Leninist enough and for not pursuing, as Lenin did, a bourgeois revolution in the name of the working class. They competed with the PCE for the leadership of the Workers Commissions, which was futile because by 1970 the Commissions were no longer a social movement but the organizations of the Stalinists and their sympathizers in the factories. In order to get elected they made concessions to the genuine working class forms of struggle, the assemblies, but they never gave them any real support. After the events at Vitoria on March 3, 1976, the differences between the splinter groups and the PCE evaporated and they followed the PCE in its politics of compromise. They participated in elections, reaping the most resounding failures. They disappeared, leaving a trail of small sects in their wake, but their political suicide was also that of the PCE, which after 1980 was transformed into a token, symbolic party, with a mercurial ideology, supported only by some proletarianized fragments of the middle and small bourgeoisie.

We can learn a few things from the classical critique of Leninism upon which our essay is based. First, that the foundations of action that tip the social scales against capitalism are not discovered by means of organizational methods of the kind that characterize trade unions or parties, or parliaments, or state institutions, or any institutions or groups that are in any way involved in any

aspect of domination. Second, that activists must place the highest emphasis on the capacity for association, the fortification of the will to act and the development of critical consciousness, and these factors must be emphasized even more than immediate interests. And third, that the masses must choose between experiencing and instilling fear.

Miguel Amorós, march 27, 2007.

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“Leninismo, ideología fascista”

City air

The end of freedom in the generalization of urban space

If, as Hegel said, city air makes one free, one is equally justified in saying that the air of the conurbation makes one a slave. If the agora, the forum and the public square made freedom and equality possible, their disappearance has annihilated them. The conurbation that has replaced the city — which some have called the post-city — has very different characteristics. The conurbation is precisely the opposite of the city, the exact contrary of a place whose scale fits its residents: it is a non-city, a space made to accommodate the automobile. A random pile of buildings scattered over the surface of a territory without any more order than that imposed by urban belts and the highways that separate them. What defines a city is public space, the common terrain for the conditions of public life, where the residents, those whom we may justly call citizens, can express themselves; where they can formulate and defend a collective project. Thanks to this political dimension, the polis, that is, the city, was the privileged locus of history, of history as the unfolding of freedom. In the conurbation, however, there is no public space; it is a neutral zone where urban relations, political dialogue and citizen's self-administration are rendered impossible; a spectacle-space that does not invite communitarian practices but rather circuses devoted to engendering passivity. What defines the conurbation is the circulatory space, the asphalt, which practically covers all the surfaces that are not occupied by buildings. It is not only a space where one can go from one end to the other without coming into contact with anyone else, but one where encounters are impossible; a dead place in which freedom and history are destroyed. Since the city is no longer a city, the citizens are no longer citizens. Those who now call themselves citizens are really only voters, without any sense of belonging to a particular place, since the conurbation does not belong to those who inhabit it. Urbanism has been the instrument of this dispossession.

Urbanism arose when the fate of the city fell into the hands of the bourgeoisie. Urbanism is nothing but the projection of bourgeois ideology into the civil space, or, which amounts to the same thing, the tool with which the city is transformed into a center for the accumulation of capital. Its first steps were carried out with surgical precision; at the expense of confiscated monastery gardens, old city walls and venerable alleys, huge squares and wide, straight

roads were built that laid the groundworks for the predominance of circulation through urban space: the circulation of troops, commodities, carriages ... in short, of capital. The commodity colonized social relations and introduced a new concept of time: time is money. The citizen masses are set in motion, spurred on by the haste imposed upon them by the economy. The city grew because it had to absorb the surplus paupers of the peasant population who fled to the city in search of work and because the new ruling class needed to make a space of its own. By way of domestic reforms, the bourgeoisie created new centers where commercial and financial activity were concentrated. The center was segregated from the periphery, where industrial activities were situated, and where the slaughterhouses, cemeteries, madhouses and prisons were relocated. For their own living space, the bourgeoisie constructed new neighborhoods, the suburbs, separated from the old neighborhoods where the artisans and workers lived. Public space, once it was embourgeoisified, disappeared; the bourgeoisie is a class that values its privacy above all. In the exclusive suburbs the buildings are tall, with large houses, spacious streets, with stores and luxury shops. The bourgeois idea of a public building is not the palace, or even the modest "trade union center". Large buildings represent the bourgeois ideology of progress. Thus, thanks to the use of steel, the new consistories would be built, preferentially in an eclectic style, the edifices hosting the Post Offices and Telephone Companies, the municipal markets, the train stations and all the headquarters of the banks and big businesses. Bricks, steel and cement have no other function than to provide a space for new social hierarchy that rules in the city, one that is exclusively preoccupied with the movement of commodities and money. The imposing presence of the buildings must inhibit any typical everyday practice of an egalitarian society, and paralyze all social dynamics in its vicinity; in short, it must maintain order. The quadrilateral or orthogonal design does not confer any meaning at all to collective values, but rather reveals a parcelization of the terrain that obeys economic rationality: the creation of the real estate market. At the same time that the bourgeoisie made land into a commercial value, it consecrated privacy as the supreme value, since, unlike the situation in the workers neighborhoods, in the suburbs the interior is privileged over the exterior and, as a result, social life is devalued. The preponderance of circulation over the terrain is also the preponderance of private life, urbanistically represented by the island of houses, the block. The bourgeois city is a splintered city, in which every fragment is made autonomous: the political center, the commercial and financial center, the bourgeois residential suburb, the working class slums, the industrial suburbs, the bullring.... The spaces that were once common lost their capacities for hosting relations and

communication, the streets separated the houses, the stairways separated the floors, and neighbors, enclosed in their rooms, were separated from the world. This movement, repeated *ad infinitum*, put an end to the experience of space. It separated space from time and from memory; its monuments are memorials to forgetting. Because it was subjected to circulation the city lost its rhythm. The street is no longer inhabited; it is only a place to pass through to buy things or go to work.

In the Spanish State, at the end of the 1950s, the major cities took a great leap forward with regard to urbanization. The Development Plans and the injection of foreign capital were, for that era, the equivalent of what the demolition of the old city walls and the arrival of the railroad were for the previous era. Industrial activity became preponderant and was concentrated around the cities, forcing an exodus of the rural population. Within 15 years, the population of many cities would double. The wave of migrants from the countryside could barely be housed in apartment blocks and housing developments of a dismal architectural cast, vertical and cheap, situated according to the cost of the land for the purpose of putting as many residents as possible on each square meter. The city block as the unity of residences was definitively abandoned and the open block became the cellular unit of the urban framework. Spatially, it meant a greater degree of privacy and anonymity. Although growth was planned for the first time, or almost the first time, the urban development plans only indiscriminately filled up the terrains situated between the historic city and a purposefully designed network of highways, giving shape to a scheme of concentric growth — like an oil spill — that would never be modified. The decline of the working class neighborhoods provoked the flight of the middle classes to the periphery, which in turn resulted in long commutes and generalized the use of the automobile. The city outgrew its limitations thanks to the motor vehicle. By expanding, distances were multiplied and it forfeited its form, and yet more means of transport would be required. Automobile traffic inconspicuously appeared and then took possession of the streets. In a few years it would be the absolute master of the industrial city. During the 1960s, the cities not only expanded; they became suburbanized. The motorization of the population, the massive warehousing of people in the outskirts of the cities, the decline of the historical centers of the cities and the destruction of the urban green spaces were simultaneous phenomena. Economic problems would be joined by problems relating to everyday misery, or, to put it in sociological terms, to the “declining quality of life”.

But while every public demonstration was repressed, the personal automobile, the television and a minimum capacity of consumption expanded the boundaries

of private life. Football replaced the bulls as the most popular mass spectacle. Zoning as an exclusionary principle, fully equipped privatization and the dictatorship of circulation characterized urban development, which resulted in an agglomeration of individuals with hardly any connections with each other, indifferent with regard to place, motorized slaves of the laws dictated by the "infrastructure", whether on the bypasses or the freeways.

Urban development was not, however, a specific feature of the Franco dictatorship. First formulated by the American President Truman in 1949, it was the official doctrine of all the ruling classes and of all those who spoke in the name of the oppressed. This is why the change of regime brought to light a separate political class but did not imply a change of direction with regard to urbanist fascism and much less a return of public life. After a brief period of illusions, politics and trade unionism underwent a process of professionalization that proceeded in parallel with the de-activation of the neighborhood movement, processes that replaced the previously utilized repressive mechanisms and performed much more effectively. Spain was still "one big urbanizing country". The new municipal plans were seemingly different on the surface but were designed according to the same patterns. A few band-aids, some more verticality, more zoning, a lot more cars and, once again, urban development without any other justification than the continuity of real estate speculation, since the population stopped growing almost twenty years earlier. Under the slogan, "the land for those who reclassify it", the speculators filled every empty lot in the cities with buildings until they created a second, third and fourth suburban belt, consuming the brownfields and what was left of the agricultural land near the cities, in order to connect the adjacent cities and towns into one big metropolitan region. The phenomenon has been called "peri-urbanization". The old central working class neighborhoods were depopulated and partially reoccupied by a marginal population, accelerating the process of decline of these areas. The old suburbs also began to undergo a decline in population; a large part of the younger generation sought housing in the first or second metropolitan outer belts, either from a desire for a better environment, or for lower-priced housing. Thanks to the defeat of the workers movement the few places that had been liberated for public life could be pacified and emancipatory unrest was successfully dissolved in an ocean of consumerism and ludic distractions. The intellectual underdevelopment of the residents was so much accentuated by urbanism that it was easy to indoctrinate them for consumption and mortgages. Urban development exacerbated all the traits of bourgeois urbanism: the fragmentation of the city, the destruction of the territory, massification, mental infantilism, the predominance of mobility

over localities, unlimited urbanization.... Prefabricated materials prepared the consumers for absolute uniformity by way of millions of identical houses and apartments. An anonymous architecture entailed an impersonal lifestyle, one that is as insensitive to ugliness as it is to beauty, ruled by a notion of private comfort that is based on the elevator, windows, air conditioning, bathrooms and above all in a kind of bunkerization, with alarms, access codes and steel doors. Urban development, in the post-dictatorial democracy as well as in the Dictatorship, transformed the city into a mere support for autonomous circulation, and everything else follows from there. One can no longer call the final result a city, since it is an urbanized extension without any limits, without form and without character; a node, or a “hub”, or a point of articulation of the reticulum of the global economy, and all of them are more or less the same. Patrick Geddes called this a “conurbation”; others called it an “urban system”. It was not the fruit of globalization; it was the *conditio sine qua non* for globalization’s operation. Globalization is based on a network of hyper-urbanized territories where information and capital circulate in real time; thus upon a cluster of conurbations. The conurbation of the era of globalization has three traits that always characterize its exemplars: absence of borders (“the generalization of urban space”), a variety of centers (“multipolarity”) and an extreme degree of social breakdown (atomization). These are the traits that are required by a tertiary economy that, by geographically separating the productive process from the sites of consumption, raises circulation to the level of the preponderant activity. And with this circulation, all its related aspects: warehouses, assembly, distribution and transport. In order to adapt to a service economy, the conurbation must, on the one hand, attain a critical size that makes it profitable as a market; on the other hand, it must dissolve its center in an effective network of specialized poles of activity. The necessary population comes from far away, expelled from their countries by the liquidation of the forms of society that preceded globalization. Finally, the conurbation must be linked with all the other conurbations in every possible way and in such a way as to facilitate high velocity relations. In order to retain its place within the network of capitalist flows, it must have large-scale infrastructures, a regular supply of gasoline, excellent business services and spectacular marketing based on world events like sports or cultural celebrations. The conurbation is a territory-business in a perpetual state of self-promotion and festival, which must be comfortable to enter and easy to leave. The activity to which its residents devote the majority of their time is circulatory; they go from their dormitory-suburb to work or to the commercial center. Urban space is now a space without conflicts, without events, where nothing ever happens; a space

without a past and therefore without a history. The twenty- or thirty-storey towers are the paradigms of urban solitude and tranquility. An inhospitable place, where no one enters into gratifying relations, or establishes solid connections, or thinks they will stay there forever. A dangerous place where chance allocates bad luck, since, despite the fact that individuals have sacrificed their freedom, their independence and even their health for the protection offered by the economy and the State, the sensation of insecurity is considerable; a place that is suitable for gregarious personnel and unhappy and predatory people.



Louis Moreau, *L'en dehors*, 1922.

Historical memory has been erased thanks to the destruction or the museification of the places where, once upon a time, there was life and tension. Their meaning has been utterly uprooted or denatured by the narrative that expresses something like the antiseptic happiness of a visitor's center. Their tours are organized to the rhythm of the museum, mixing everything up in touristic itineraries. The conurbation has lost any sign of identity, any cultural or historical significance, any specificity: it could be anywhere, a provisional and sterile place, a non-place. The ruling classes try to provide it with a new identity by means of monumental "brand-name" architecture. This architecture is independent of the place where it is built; it might as well be anywhere and it is for that reason ideal for conurbations: it faithfully reflects the dissolution of the city, the rootless condition that reigns over the corpse of communitarian values. The "artist" architect is indifferent to the social environment, an enemy of the

continuous narrative, hostile to the idea of equilibrium with the surroundings. The technological outrage, the expression of dissonance, in short, the building that is an insult, is precisely what he is looking for; that reflects his “personal touch”. The ostentatious building does not have to set down any roots at all; it only has to land on the surface of the conurbation. It therefore has a strange feel, as if it came from a “Martian” reality. It cannot establish the least relation with the inhabitants, since the latter, in a way, are also “Martians”. The monuments of the era of globalization destroy the reality of places and exile them to the realm of virtuality. As images, they are signs of a separate reality, where everyone must behave like spectators. They are like macro-events: enormous publicity operations that make a tabula rasa of history. Their presence in this neutralized chaos materializes the conception of the world of the managers of urban totalitarianism, and conclusively affirms the criminal model of society that they have chosen in our names.

If the politics of infrastructure has a weak point, it is not the dwindling supply of fresh water, the enormous production of wastes or the generalization of abnormal behavior; the conurbation long ago left behind any human living conditions. The Achilles Heel of the conurbation is petroleum. The growth of the suburbs depends on the proliferation of automobiles and an unlimited supply of fuel. Thus, the end of urban hyper-development—and of capitalism—will not come at the hands of climate change or an unprecedented deadly epidemic, but from a simple energy crisis. Fossil fuels are what made modern industry, transportation, and therefore conurbations possible. They are so intimately linked to the global economy that when they begin to become scarce that economy will not be able to survive. Growth in a context of declining oil production will lead to social collapse. At this time, no form of energy, not even nuclear power, can replace oil. The entire economic system will cease to be profitable. The conurbations, without automobiles, will not be viable. Millions of second homes will be abandoned or will be occupied by fugitives from the metropolis. And this is just what will happen within a few decades. Once again, the objective conditions will arise that will force proletarianized individuals to look soberly at the world and to act accordingly. It is therefore not a matter of sitting and waiting for the corpse of capitalism to make its exit. It is advisable to take action and to know where to strike. The struggle to liberate urban space will be the new class struggle. A radical program must oppose urban development and demand a return to the city, that is, to the agora and the assembly. It must propose to set limits to urban space, to restore its form, to reduce its size, to put brakes on its mobility. To reunite the fragments, to rebuild homes, to reestablish relations of solidarity and fraternal bonds, to

recreate public life. To de-motorize, to live without haste. To leave the market behind, to re-localize production, to preserve equilibrium with the countryside, to demolish three-quarters of what has been built, to make the territory less crowded. The economy must once again be a simple domestic affair. Put anonymity behind us. The individual must develop until he finds his place in the collectivity and puts down roots. The city must generate an atmosphere that, when breathed by its inhabitants, will make them free.

Miguel Amorós.

Transcript of a talk given at the Ateneo Libertario of El Cabanyal,
Valencia, on June 16, 2007.

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“El aire de la ciudad:
el fin de la libertad en la generalización de lo urbano”

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Professional anarchy and theoretical disarmament: On insurrectionism

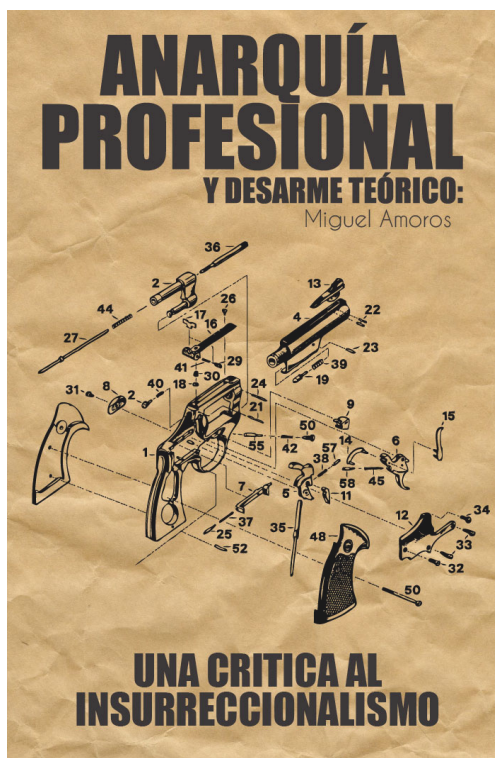
“We are certain that communities of joy will emerge from our struggle here and now.”

Alfredo Bonanno, *Armed Joy*.

For the last ten years or so, Spain’s superannuated libertarian milieu has been convulsed by an anarchist current whose activities have led to a change of perspective with regard to the approach to revolutionary action. Restricting its critique to tactical questions and ignoring all else, its contributions have not been numerous. The real conditions of the present time, beginning with the absence of major struggles, the non-existence of a workers movement and an anarchist milieu in decline, were not the most favorable circumstances in which the insurrectionist proposals for action could break with the pacifist spectacle of the social pseudo-movements that have lately begun to proliferate. The “insu” sabotage actions have been viewed by the unconscious masses as something alien and foreign to them, which made the job of repressing them so much easier. But we would be erring on the side of severity if we were to fail to recognize in the impulse that lies behind these actions an authentic will to struggle and an intelligence that was more effectively proceeding towards the radical critique of existing conditions than that of the other modern libertarian currents, of the primitivist, green, communalist, municipalist, etc., varieties. This is already reason enough to address the question of the insurrectionist current and engage in a critical review of its main postulates.

To begin with, insurrectionist anarchism seems to be very closely connected with the figure of Bonanno, its main exponent, although he does not hold any official positions in the movement, nor does he perform any informal leadership functions; he is only represented in the movement by the force of his personality. While it is true that his opinions and actions also provoke hostile criticism and disagreements between the groups, and that there have also been other important “theoreticians” such as Constantino Cavallieri, his role in the genesis of the tactics that characterize insurrectionism and his influence on the majority of its activists are indisputable. Bonanno is a veteran anarchist with extensive experience and a public enemy of domination whom the state has treated to various trials and prison terms. He has published many writings that

allow us to get a clear idea of his ideas, which are in any event not at all complicated or original; by his background and character he has always viewed the least significant philosophical reflection as what he calls “metaphysics”, which should not be at all surprising since the real Bonanno has been an agitator and a man of action first and only secondarily an analytic and clear thinker. Our intention will be to detect the appearance of insurrectionist ideas and follow his development by means of an account of his experiences and personal career, exercising due methodological caution, and insisting on the fact that Bonnanism is not all there is to insurrectionism.



Alfredo Maria Bonanno was born in Catania (Sicily) in 1937, the son of a relatively well-off family. We know nothing about his first thirty years; his first writings that we know of date from 1970 and are concerned with atheism and the “autonomy of the rank and file productive nuclei”. A text from 1971 speaks of “counterpower”, which indicates “operaist” influences that could have come

from either Negri or the Spontaneist-Maoist organization, “Potere Operaio”. “Operaism” was a critical Marxist current that during the sixties played more or less the same role in Italy that “Socialisme ou Barbarie” played in France, bringing theoretical renovation to the ranks of the libertarian milieus. Bonanno also carried out translations of classics like Rudolph Rocker and the not-so-classic Gastón Leval. When the waters of Italian anarchism began to be stirred as a result of May ’68 and the strikes of the “hot autumn” of 1969, our protagonist was already familiar enough with anarchist ideology to unequivocally position himself “on the left” in a generational debate. The young libertarians did not want to limit their actions to propaganda and proselytism; they wanted to effectively participate in the real struggles, in order “*to contribute to the growth of revolutionary anarchist consciousness in the masses*”. The organization of the glorious elders and their followers was more concerned with its meetings and congresses than with struggles and only aspired to “*gather as many people as possible under one acronym or one flag*”, and was not concerned so much with “*attacking power as with trying to cause it the least possible disturbance in order to continue to utilize the tiny spaces where its struggles took place or where it indulged in illusions about its struggle*”. It was therefore “*a movement that served as a custodian of a patrimony of ideas, analyses and specific experiences, but it has no direct relation with the struggles that are currently underway*” (Bonanno, “Fictitious Movement and Real Movement”¹⁹). A morass of organic accords and procedures allowed a small bureaucracy of officials to paralyze any initiative that was not consonant with the official line, which is why the question of the organic proceedings was the main *casus belli* that pitted the old immobilized militants against the new generation of activists. The Italian Anarchist Federation was organized on the basis of an “associative pact” that had been composed by Malatesta himself. As an organization “of synthesis”, there was room in it for anarchists of all tendencies, but not all tactics, since the latter were conveniently determined at the congresses, where “*tiny vacuous power centres*” controlled, judged, condemned or absolved minority views. The young anarchists advocated a flexible structure of “affinity groups”, without a program, rules or committees, or any unifying bond other than individual autonomy and personal responsibility. Critical of the trade unions, they promoted the idea of small rank and file organizations independent of any political or trade union structure, such as, for example, the Autonomous Movement of Railroad Workers of Turin, as the optimal means of intervention of anarchists in the struggles. Bonanno proclaimed:

¹⁹ English translations of Bonanno’s texts can be found online at the website of the [Anarchist Library](#) — translator’s note.

“We are advocates of organization.... but organization cannot become a self-sufficient thing, isolated from the struggle, an obstacle that must be overcome before gaining access to the arena of the class war.”

The most important question that divided the old and the young libertarians, however, was that of revolutionary violence. At that time the Italian bourgeoisie was experimenting with terror, and the problem of violent response arose, and the armed struggle or violent attacks were merely aspects of that problem that were impossible to ignore. The proprietor-militants of the FAI not only avoided participating in such debates; they attempted to isolate anyone who even suggested they were necessary by means of calumny and underhanded machinations. The point was finally reached where what bound the young libertarians to the FAI was completely overshadowed by what alienated them from it, so that it did not take long for splits to develop. In 1969 the breaks began; there were impatient militants who joined *Lotta Continua* or *Potere Operaio*, while others founded the *Federated Anarchist Groups* and published “*A Rivista Anarchica*”, which was for many years the *tribune* of the “alternative” anarchists. An interesting contribution of this current was its critique of the “technobureaucracy” and the new “managerial” capitalism, plagiarized from John Burnham’s “*Managerial Revolution*”, which Bonanno noted and would regurgitate in later works. A third current was formed by those who were inspired by the Platform of Arshinov and Makhno, like the French *ORA*, advocating an even more strict, and especially more vanguardist, organization, one that would be the guardian of the principles of a zealously defended anarchism.

Even aside from the splits, however, the main problem of the FAI beginning in 1968 seems to have been the impact of situationist ideas, the true solvent of the stereotyped militant slogans and anarchosyndicalist and anti-Marxist discourse that served as the foundation for a stagnant and paralyzing ideology, incapable of engaging in a unitary and radical critique of the new class society within which the struggles against a renewed Power had to orient themselves. The Situationist International, which had an Italian Section, had in its last years embodied the figure of “historical evil” for the proprietors of the FAI, the ideologues of a particular kind of anarchism that was perfectly compatible with a modernized class society. The tension between these proprietors and a dissident sector in a state of constant unrest that accused them of bureaucratism and ideology and that advocated a critique of everyday life, spoke of workers councils or advocated violent methods, provoked a paranoid defensive reflex among the proprietary layer of the FAI. The FAIista bureaucrats thought they had been infiltrated by mysterious situationist agents and reacted by convening

a congress, the FAI's tenth, held in Carrara on April 10, 1971, which was specifically devoted to combating the phantom of the S.I. The congress voted to exclude the "anarcho-situationists" in order to prevent their example from spreading to the local groups and federations. The insignificant FAI, obsessed with what was nothing more than the antibureaucratic effects of the first stage of proletarian autonomy, remained blind to the real danger, that of the manipulation of the libertarian movement by the secret services of the Italian state. For the fascist bombings of Milan on April 29, 1969 and at the Piazza Fontana on December 12, 1969 were attributed by the police to the anarchists. One anarchist, Giuseppe Pinelli, was thrown from the window of a police station and another, Pietro Valpreda, was chosen as the patsy who would take the fall for the bombings. The affair transcended the scope of the libertarian milieu and shook all of society. Tempers were further inflamed in May 1972 when the anarchist Franco Serantini was beaten to death by the police at a demonstration and the police chief Calabresi, who was responsible for the death of Pinelli, was executed by a commando squad a few days later. The FAI, alarmed by the events, did not hesitate to distance itself from the violent responses to repression by condemning the attacks and the bombings directed against the police and the judiciary. Bonanno, who had condemned the bombing at Milan one year earlier, took a diametrically opposed position in which, in the pages of "Sinistra Libertaria", a publication that he edited, in an article in his name entitled, "I Know Who Killed Chief Superintendent Luigi Calabresi", he exhibited a sense of humor and displayed a degree of courage that in October 1972 earned him two years and two months in prison for writing an "apology for crime".

We have to believe that he read a lot while in jail because in 1974 he published some pamphlets about the state, abstentionism and revolution. At this stage of his career he believed that he had already decisively crossed a threshold in his thought, publishing at his own expense a thick anthology entitled "Self-management and Anarchism". During the next few years he would continue to print copies of this book, which was assembled according to the cut-and-paste method (the book was also published in a Spanish edition), while he continued writing his articles for the bi-monthly theoretical journal "Anarchismo", which he had founded in Catania. He justified the rejection of the dialectical method because it went hand in hand with "authoritarian" forms of thought that corresponded with authoritarian forms of action ("Economic Crisis and Revolutionary Opportunity"). Marx is not even useful to Bonanno as a critic of the economy because his thought is philosophical, Hegelian, and therefore "reeks of metaphysics". Allergic to the terminology of philosophy, he

goes so far as to define the Marxist oeuvre as “*a program that has its roots in the Protestant mysticism of the Middle Ages*” (“After Marx, Autonomy”), which could be considered a matter of opinion if it were not for the fact that not only did Protestantism have nothing to do with mysticism, it did not even exist in the Middle Ages. Bonanno would always have the problem of having to say something about everything, whether he knew anything about it or not, and quite frequently ridiculous errors would crop up in his extensive catalogue of works. He could have easily noted the role played by classical German philosophy in the development of revolutionary thought by taking the example of Bakunin, an unrivalled exponent of the influence of Hegel. Bonanno’s critique of trade unionism repeated what was already known since May ’68: “*Old-style capitalism has given way to a new managerial version. It is perfectly well aware that its best friend and ally is the trade union.*” (“A Critique of Syndicalist Methods”, 1975). So far he says the same things as the councilist Marxists (he quotes Pannekoek), but he only directs his criticism at the libertarian trade unions. He does not focus, however, on the workers councils, assemblies, committees and other forms of horizontal coordination because Bonanno is not interested in the working class “in itself”, but only in the way that anarchism can be articulated in its self-organization. The anarchists do not have to inject their ideas in the masses from the outside, by way of propaganda:

“The revolutionary anarchist project starts from the specific context of actual struggles.... [it] cannot be the product of the minority. It is not elaborated by the latter inside their theoretical edifice, then exported to the movement in one block or in pieces (...) it is necessary to start from the actual level of the struggles, from the concrete, material level of the class combat by constructing small autonomous rank and file institutions capable of occupying the point of convergence between the total vision of liberation and the partial strategic vision that revolutionary collaboration renders indispensable.” (“Fictitious Movement and Real Movement”)

In 1975 Bonanno thought (correctly) that Italian society was passing through a pre-revolutionary phase, and that what was fundamental was the autonomous organization of the workers, for which they needed “*autonomous rank and file nuclei*”, or “*autonomous workers nuclei*”, which were none other than “*small autonomous base organisations dedicated to the radical struggle against the present structures of production*” (“A Critique of Syndicalist Methods”). These nuclei were supposed to constitute the point of intersection between the anarchists and the proletariat. He did not trust any more broad-based structures like the workers assemblies because they restricted the autonomy of the groups and could easily be manipulated by bureaucrats and demagogues. He was not very specific about intermediate steps until a qualitative leap in social conflict placed the question of armed struggle on the agenda.

During the mid-seventies the Italian state had been seriously weakened and had revealed its frailty by its resort to the stage-managed terrorism that designated fictitious enemies, with the complicity of the communications media and the Stalinists. Attempts to restructure industry aggravated the social revolt, which spilled over from the factories into the streets. In the words of Bonanno, *"the revolutionary movement, including the anarchists, was in a phase of growth and anything seemed to be possible, even the generalization of the armed conflict"* ("Armed Joy"). The existence of a militarized party like the Red Brigades provoked the fear among the denizens of anti-authoritarian milieus that the Red Brigades would assume leadership of the struggles. The debate on armed libertarian alternatives led in 1977 to the birth of Azione Rivoluzionaria, *"a combatant structure that is as open as possible to the rank and file"*. The critique of arms, *"the only force that can make any project credible"*, according to Azione Rivoluzionaria, now reached such levels that confrontations arose, no longer just in the FAI (which, more interested in syndicalism than in the revolution, obviously condemned the armed struggle), but among the revolutionaries themselves. For some, what was taking place was a separate violence that did not work in favor of the class confrontation but of the spectacle of confrontation, contributing to the criminalization of "the movement of autonomy" and provoking its repression. For Azione Rivoluzionaria, the movement would never have been taken seriously and never would have been seriously feared if it were not for the armed groups. It was logical that the repression would fall upon the revolutionary offensive whether or not there were any armed groups, but thanks to the fact that the latter became the lightning rods for the repressive apparatus, the movement could still retain its offices, its journals and its radio stations. Bonanno's response took the form, first, of his text "Movement and Revolutionary Project", followed by the book, "Armed Joy", which had a major impact at the time due to the fact that it not only violated the taboos of the militant lifestyle, but even more importantly, due to the fact that its publication was soon prohibited (in the Bologna area about three thousand copies were sold or given away). A Spanish edition was also published. The book contains no significant analyses, nor does it seriously discuss the topic of armed struggle: it is not a book of strategy but one of principles. Its novelty did not reside in its contents, which were borrowed from the work of the group "Comontismo" (1972-1974) and from the writings of the former situationist Raoul Vaneigem, "Terrorism and Revolution" (1972) and "From the Wildcat Strike to Generalized Self-Management" (1974), which had a major impact in Italy, but in the fact that it gathers together and discusses in a facile manner suited to a broad public all the themes that could interest rebels

who did not like reading too much and those for whom the revolution is not unlike a kind of generalized open bar. Despite a few disdainful words that he devotes to May '68, his language is pro-situ: the revolution is a festival, you never have to work again, self-management is the self-management of exploitation, the struggle is pleasure, the game is a weapon, destruction of the commodity, etc. The word spectacle is repeated dozens of times, while references to the state, which would be more appropriate for an anarchist text, are few. In one section Bonanno claims, using Vaneigemist language, *"to oppose the non-work aesthetic to the work ethic"*. Although not long before he had been agitating for the "autonomous organization of production", now *"the only way for the exploited to escape the globalising project of capital is through the refusal of work, production and political economy (...). The revolution cannot be reduced to a simple reorganisation of work ... The revolution is the negation of labour and the affirmation of joy."* Despite the fact that he had devoted an entire book to the idea that the expropriated should re-appropriate the totality of the productive process, that is, self-management, now he condemns it as a mystification: *"If the struggle is victorious the self-management of production becomes superfluous, because after the revolution the organisation of production is superfluous and counter-revolutionary."* If one were to look for an outline of a strategy or simply some practical ideas to help deal with the immediate problems of the revolution that were reaching a critical stage in 1977, one would not find them in this book; the whole thing is one long expression of mystification, even with regard to the armed struggle. Besides expressing his satisfaction with the violence that was being directed against police, employers and mainstream journalists, and saying, *"hurry to arm yourself"*, he warned against the sanctification of the submachine gun, since the armed struggle *"cannot represent the revolutionary dimension"*. In any event, the armed struggle was unquestionable, since any critique directed against it would redound to the benefit of *"the torturers"*: *"When we say the time is not ripe for an armed attack on the State we are pushing open the doors of the mental asylum for the comrades who are carrying out such attacks...."* And nothing more: an appeal to enjoy life and leave the armed groups in peace while the Italian proletariat confronts the dilemma of whether it should abolish work or continue working. Bonanno, in the pages of "Anarchism", noted the generalization of illegal behaviors and the pre-revolutionary trend of the time, but the guerrilla organization Azione Rivoluzionaria published ironic comments about the purely literary character of the stance of the "critical critic of Catania" who

"Finally wants to specify the precise nature of the revolutionary tasks of the anarchists. Given his premises we would expect a response of this type: the anarchists

will have to begin to rebel. But this is not at all what he says: the anarchists have to encourage the exploited to rebel. If we were to interpret this maliciously, it means: the same old song and dance, the Leninists, the Stalinists, and the workerists rebel; but why do the anarchists limit themselves to encouraging others to rebel? Who will encourage the encouragers, then? Will they not once again find themselves outside of history? Or a more benevolent interpretation: encourage the exploited to rebel in the only way possible, that is, by rebelling, and not with rivers of ink..." (Azione Rivoluzionaria, "The Movement of 1977 and the Guerrilla").

A general strike did not take place, leaving the armed groups and the unrealistic elements like Bonanno increasingly more isolated. Although the receding of the movement of 1977 left the armed struggle as the only way out for many rebels, they did not constitute the ten, one hundred, or one thousand armed cells that Azione Rivoluzionaria announced in its founding manifesto. The trade unions imposed order in the factories and the police imposed order in the streets. The state was reinforced and illegal behavior was harshly repressed. Waves of arrests followed; the armed struggle dissolved like a sugar cube in water. In 1979 most of the members of Azione Rivoluzionaria were in prison and from their cells they delivered the coup de grâce to the guerrilla movement, some of them joining the Leninist organization Prima Linea, which gave rise to doubts concerning the ideological stability of Azione Rivoluzionaria, which had been so resoundingly proclaimed in the group's leaflets and communiqués. In late 1977 Bonanno was arrested because of his book, "Armed Joy", and condemned on November 30, 1979 to one and a half years in prison for what he had written. Instead of being scared straight or repenting, however, he fraternized with the activist prisoners, even with those of the Red Brigades and P38, publicly denouncing Amadeo Bertolo and Paolo Finzi who, from the pages of "A Rivista Anarchica" had roundly condemned his review of a book about Emile Henry. It was the first time that he had been publicly attacked in the pages of an anarchist journal and they made sure to remind him of his exhibitionism when he spoke at meetings. Bonanno took advantage of the occasion to address the question of class violence without indulging in suspicious moralisms:

"The terrorist is not the person who confronts power with violence in order to destroy it, but the person who employs violent and cruel means to assure the continuance of exploitation. For this reason, since it is only a small minority that has an interest in this continuance (employers, fascists, politicians of every stripe and flavor, trade unionists, etc.), it can be logically deduced that the 'real' terrorists are the latter elements, insofar as they employ violent means to perpetuate exploitation. And the violence of these people is carried out by way of the laws, in the prisons, in the compulsion to work, in the automatic mechanism of exploitation. The rebellion of the exploited is never terrorism." ("On the Terrorism of Certain Imbeciles and Other Matters", 1979)

By identifying the determining factors with the extreme forms of oppression, he identified the latter purely and simply with terrorism:

“We shall note that the terrorist must be the person who terrorizes another person, who tries to obtain something by imposing his point of view with actions that sow terror. It is therefore clear that power terrorizes the exploited in a hundred ways. The exploited are afraid they cannot find work, they are afraid of poverty, of the laws, of the police, of public opinion; they suffer from a concentrated form of psychological terrorism that reduces them to a situation of almost total submission in the struggle against power. That is terrorism.” (ibid.)

Bonanno, however, did not advocate the armed struggle, which was still debatable on the strategic level, much less the need for an “armed party”. What he rejected was the absolute juxtaposition, which he considered to be Manichaeism, of the armed struggle and the mass struggle, because this leads to the delegitimization and criminalization of those who engaged in the former. He posed the question but did not resolve it. The armed struggle was therefore a respectable option with which you may or may not agree, but which no guardian of anarchy may excommunicate you from the fold for supporting. It was not all good, nor was it all bad, but it was always ethically justifiable. This theme became his specialty, but he did not stop there. From then on his thought exhibited a disturbing stylistic discontinuity and confusion. Bonanno was suffering from graphomania and confidently tackled any issue, with a sententious tone that reflected an attempt to produce an impression of profundity, and with abundant allusions to convey the appearance of not saying all that he knew; the usual conceits to leave the indiscriminating reader open-mouthed. Facts were rarely mentioned and he hardly ever resorted to their use in order to provide a basis for his peremptory assertions. If he mentioned the “actual movement”, it was merely a cliché for his affected rhetoric. He went from one thing to another amidst outbursts, incongruous topics, gratuitous assertions and, now and then, a truth that was half-buried among so many phrases, confecting everything without the least logical connection. The conclusion was the principle: insurrectionist action. We could provide dozens of examples of his irrationality; but it will suffice to take a look at “The Baby and the Bathwater”, in which he aspires to liquidate, among other things, his poorly assimilated situationism, the “movement”, the dialectic and Marxism. The fact that Bonanno scorned theoretical activity if it did not lead to immediate and forceful action did not spare him from becoming, to use his own words, one of those “aficionados of the pen, who produce analyses the way Fiat produces cars”.

In May 1980 the police carried out a raid against anarchists associated with the journal “Anarchism”. Bonanno and his comrades were accused of belonging

to Azione Rivoluzionaria, but the show broke up in the middle of the presentation of the evidence. The last days of the revolutionary movement unfolded in the presence of a vast number of informers and penitents. Toni Negri himself led the “dissociated”, those who promised to never fight the state again in exchange for special treatment in prison, and directed his appeal to the chorus of those who were calling for an amnesty. Bonanno correctly lashed out against all of them in a little book entitled “And We Will Still Be Ready To Storm The Heavens Another Time: Against Amnesty”, which earned him another trial. From the fact that the revolutionaries were easily defeated he drew conclusions that were diametrically opposed to the conclusions drawn by the surviving anarchist organizations, since his conclusions pointed towards violent action against the persons and the things that embodied repression, bourgeois justice, the technobureaucracy, trade unionism and capitalism, all of which must be “*translated into precise acts, acts of attack, not just verbal, but in the form of deeds*” (“The Illogical Revolution”, 1984). Real anarchists must be in permanent revolt and must go on the offensive:

“We insistently reassert our conviction that the use of organized violence against the exploiters, even when it takes the form of isolated actions on the part of minorities, is an indispensable instrument of the anarchist struggle against exploitation” (“And Us, Etc.”).

After years of beating around the bush, he finally decided to take the plunge. The discussions in prison and the shameful spectacle of the penitents and the dissociated made their contributions to this decision. Bonanno, to whom we should be grateful that he forgot about Spinoza and the “diffuse worker”, expressed obvious truths that were fortunately not dissimulated behind his pretentious logorrhea: “*They will not give us an amnesty. We will have to pay for it.*” The price will be the revolutionary spirit, ideas, dignity, courage:

“By accepting the agreement today, tomorrow at best we might perhaps struggle inside the ghetto where power will have parked us ... Collaborating means surrendering to the enemy outright.” For the extremist Stalinists: “The reduction of class war to a mere military confrontation carries within it the logical conclusion that, if we undergo a military defeat on this terrain, the class war ceases to exist as such. From this we come to the not just theoretical but practical absurdity that in Italy today, after the defeat of the combatant organizations, there is no longer an actual class war, and that it is in everyone’s interest (and in the State’s interest first of all), to negotiate a surrender in order to avoid the development, or the continued development, of a process of struggle that is absolutely nonexistent and completely useless as well as dangerous for all of us.” (“And We Will Still Be Ready To Storm The Heavens Another Time: Against Amnesty”).

For the treason of Negri and the collaborators resides in their peculiar Leninism that translates everything into terms of separate power: as the self-proclaimed representatives of the working class, they were the privileged interlocutors of the state and their salvation was when they whitewashed the central question; the defeated party would not fight to achieve their liberation, but instead sought to negotiate for their liberation in order to resume the struggle with other means. With the future mortgaged by pacts with the state, what kind of struggle could this be? Bonanno astutely pointed out that it was one thing to disarm as a result of a change of opinion, and another to do so because the ruling power demanded it:

“They are inviting us to not be the naughty boys we have always been and to understand the situation. They are inviting us to collaborate.” To the state, no one is innocent: “We cannot turn ourselves into dwarves now, after having dreamed, elbow to elbow, each feeling the others’ heartbeats, of attacking and overthrowing the gods. This is the dream that makes power afraid [...] No one can be neutral; we are guilty of the planning and preparation of that climate which filled us with enthusiasm and led us along. Even the most critical of us could not claim perfect innocence. In the eyes of the State, it is precisely this climate that is guilty. We must assume responsibility for this.” (ibid.)

But these flashes of lucidity were not enough to shed light on the new panorama of the eighties, with a defeated working class and thousands of prisoners in the jails. In vain do we search his work for a balance sheet of the process that led to this disaster. Bonanno only offers us a reaffirmation:

“In these times of liquidation and stagnation, we reaffirm that our struggle is a struggle for total liberation, now and right now.”

Employing a reverse Manichaeism, he opposed the mass struggle to the insurrectionist struggle, because he does not consider the former as a moment in the development of the latter, but as an instrument of the latter:

“For us, intermediate struggles are not a goal but a means that we use (even rather often) to achieve a different goal: that of urging people to revolt [...] The important thing is that intermediate struggles must reach a violent outcome, a breaking point, an essential line beyond which recuperation would no longer be possible...”

To reach this point we need a consciousness of the need to generalize violence and this was the function of the “specific movement”:

“we must create the possibility of a specific movement that is capable of encountering the real movement, in places and moods in which the latter’s pulse becomes perceptible to the former.” (ibid.)

Insofar as this logorrhea makes any sense, it sounds bad: the masses were incapable of attaining revolutionary goals without the existence of an elite, let us

call it the “specific movement”, or else their “intermediate” struggles will never attain the necessary insurrectionist level. Bonannist anarchism was crystallizing into a vulgar adventurist and vanguardist ideology, quite similar in its theoretical foundations to the militarist extremism of the “armed party”. Over the next few years Bonanno would elaborate the essential concepts of the insurrectionist ideology on the basis of the separation between the mass struggle and the insurrectionist struggle, a separation that only a select, “specific” minority can help to overcome. His work began to be known outside of Italy and he became a notorious figure for international anarchism. His great theoretical discovery — that any kind of action, no matter how minoritarian it may be, was possible and desirable at any time — infallibly marked the way forward for him.

In the beginning was the deed. The separation between theory and practice reduced the former to a simple accompaniment and the latter to a mere technique. For Bonanno, the “refusal to wait” exhibited by the “specific” anarchist organizations and the “transition to action” required a different type of organization, one that was not permanent, defined as “informal”, and he thought he found such an organization in the affinity groups. These groups will have to elaborate a “project” that is the product of their analyses and discussions, which would provide orientation to the groups and be a stimulus for action. Utilizing the technical jargon of business marketing, in one of his articles in “Anarchism”, he described this project as “*the place where theory is converted into practice*”, specifying the four preconditions *sine qua non* for its elaboration that must be united in the revolutionary, that is, courage, persistence, creativity and “materiality” (something like a practical sense). A meeting held in Milan in 1985, organized around the theme of “Anarchism and the Insurrectionist Project”, allowed Bonanno to expound in broad strokes his vision of the transformations that had taken place in capitalism. The flippant way he brandished trivialities that had been made fashionable by American sociology (such as, for example, defining society as “post-industrial”), and the professorial tone he employed that so rapidly lost its charm, were quite shocking. In the transcript of his speech we may read this monstrosity:

“The capacity of capital from the productive point of view is not based today on the resources of finance capital, that is, on investments and money, but is instead based essentially and almost in its totality on intellectual capital.”

Although it might seem like a lie, Bonanno repeated what professor Negri was saying.

“Capital no longer needs to resort to workers to carry out production” since “the main focus of the working class has been moved elsewhere. At first, timidly, in the

sense of a diffusion of the factory in the territory [Negri again]. Then more decisively, in the sense of a gradual replacement of the classic secondary productive processes by the tertiary ones.”

One has to ask oneself if he knows what he is saying, since the tertiary processes have nothing to do with production, but the Bonannist prose has always been a tortured prose, especially when used for theoretical purposes. According to him the working class is being progressively sidelined from production, thus forfeiting its leading role and, furthermore, the revolution is just as likely to take place as not to take place because in the post-industrial society the relation of cause and effect between the struggles and their consequences has disappeared. Yet without giving a reason, he says that, “*it is for precisely this reason that the revolution becomes possible.*” Bonanno had heard of the revolts in the marginal neighborhoods of the cities of England and gratuitously pontificated on the task of the anarchists:

“to transform the irrational situations of the uprising into an insurrectionist and revolutionary reality.”

The matter was set aside *sine die*, but we have already said that theory was not his strong point and because he had to regularly write copy for two publications, he unscrupulously operated on the basis of pirated materials. In 1987, he copied the format and typographical features of the journal, “Encyclopédie des Nuisances” for the new series of “Anarchism”, which would be an innocent anecdote if not for the fact that he published three articles from the EdN in each of his publications, which featured undisclosed deletions, abusive interpolations, arbitrary revisions and numerous errors without any apparent purpose, which forced the EdN to publish a communiqué that concluded:

“Those who, exhibiting a critique that is not their own, begin by dissimulating its origin to the best of their abilities, as well as concealing the struggles from which this critique emerges and the relations that these struggles imply, thus demonstrate that they are incapable of using it and discovering the secrets of their epoch or understanding the diverse special operations of spectacular democracy. Where fiction dominates the big picture, petty falsifications can have no importance. However, we avail ourselves of the opportunity to declare our modest conviction that these falsifications explain the triumph of the fiction on the large scale, and that the overthrow of the latter passes through the end of the former.”

Such trivialities were of no concern to Bonanno. His problem was, on the one hand, the “attack”, and on the other, the attempts on the part of the police to implicate him in various terrorist incidents.

Bonanno was the first agitator since Blanqui to proclaim the possibility of an offensive against Power during a period when the working class was in full

retreat. This evidently involved an attempt to escape from historical determinations by way of the decisive actions of minorities. The leading role, according to Bonanno, fell to the informal groups, the only ones that are capable of carrying out serious action. Such revolutionary revuls were not for the masses. He condemned mass demonstrations as useless pacifism and proposed instead, together with demonstrations "*organized in the insurrectionist way*", "*the need for small-scale destructive actions of direct attack against the structures of capital.*" The groups must assume full responsibility for these attacks and they must not be contingent on favorable or unfavorable circumstances, or on the general level of consciousness. The decision to directly attack Capital and the state involves only the revolutionaries, who are the guardians of the insurrectionist essence of the conflict:

"We either attack or retreat. We either completely accept the class logic of the confrontation as the irresolvable and irreducible contrast or else we go backwards, back to negotiations, details, linguistic and moral confusion."

If they want to live their lives, liberate their instincts, negate bourgeois ideals, satisfy their authentic needs or any other trifle of the liberated vocabulary of dissatisfied rebels, words are not enough. Each anarchist has to overcome the political and moral barriers that prevent him from engaging in action. Bonanno characterized these efforts as "*the great project of liberating the new man from ethics*" ("The Moral Breaking Point", in "Provocazione", a publication he edited, March 1988). He scorned assemblyist methods because they delayed or prevented more resolute actions, as well as initiatives that sought to obtain the maximum number of supporters, which he referred to as "the mania of quantity". This is why he paid no attention to the workplace-based demands of such rank and file movements as the COBAS, formed in November 1987. The Bonannist model was the "self-managed leagues" that were formed during the early 1980s by the inhabitants of Comiso (Sicily) to oppose the construction of an American missile base. These groups were composed of informal "nuclei" under the guidance of anarchists whose sole objective was the destruction of the military base, without any program, autonomous (independent of parties, trade unions or any other bodies), in "permanent conflict" with domination and engaged in "permanent offensive", without engaging in dialogue, transactions or agreements. It was certainly in order to distinguish these struggles from the struggles that were not immediately oriented to destruction, that he called the latter type of conflict "intermediate struggles", unlike the other kind that had more extensive goals that were motivated by "the work of insurrection" such as the "struggle against technology", which resulted in more than one hundred high tension electric power pylons being dynamited between 1986 and 1988.

The translation of a German pamphlet that provided details on how to destroy one of these pylons earned Bonanno another stay in prison. In this campaign against the construction of new high voltage power lines, in which rebels from various countries participated, the mania for quantity returned via the back door: the trade unionists counted membership cards and the activists counted attacks. The quantitative spirit ruled all. But the efficacy of an attack does not depend on the number of explosions, or the amount of destruction caused. There are no “intermediate” struggles as opposed to real struggles; there are practical struggles and useless struggles, struggles that awaken the consciousness of oppression and struggles that cause it to go to sleep. The police were unable to implicate Bonanno in any violent acts but they cunningly managed to implicate him in a robbery at a jewelry store. He was arrested on February 2, 1989 and released without charges being filed against him two years later. Once he was released he took advantage of the opportunity to travel to Spain and provided the finishing touch to insurrectionism, an ideology that has been influential in the anarchist milieus of various countries where anarchism was stagnant, dormant and controlled by cliques.

In 1992 Bonanno and some of his comrades proposed to make a qualitative leap forward in the “offensive” by setting up an “organizational opportunity”. Towards this end they formed the group to promote the constitution of an Anti-authoritarian Insurrectionist International. The word, “Insurrectionist” made its debut at this time. In January 1993 he went to Greece and spoke at two conferences at the Universities of Athens and Thessalonica in which he explained, “why we are insurrectionist anarchists”. What follows is the insurrectionist ideology summarized in six points:

“Because we consider it possible to contribute to the development of struggles that are appearing spontaneously everywhere, turning them into mass insurrections, that is to say, actual revolutions.

“Because we want to destroy the capitalist order of the world which, thanks to computer science restructuring, has become technologically useful to no one but the managers of class domination.

“Because we are for the immediate, destructive attack against the structures, individuals and organisations of Capital and the State.

“Because we constructively criticise all those who are in situations of compromise with power in their belief that the revolutionary struggle is impossible at the present time.

“Because rather than wait, we have decided to proceed to action, even if the time is not ripe.

“Because we want to put an end to this state of affairs right away, rather than wait until conditions make its transformation possible” (“The Insurrectionist Project”, 1998)

The organizational conception, the elements of which had been gradually formulated during the course of the previous twenty-five years, would complete the ideology. Bonanno restricted himself to inserting it into a descriptive label that many people would not agree with. "The insurrectionist revolutionary anarchist organization" consists of affinity groups formed on the occasions of struggles *"for the purpose of carrying out precise actions against the enemy"* and *"creating the best conditions for a mass insurrectionist uprising"*. The insurrectionist character is conferred by the "permanent state of conflict", that is, by the knowledge of being at war against capitalist and state oppression. These groups are based on "rank and file nuclei", an old Bonannist idea, whose function *"is to replace, within the arena of the intermediate struggles, the old trade union organizations of resistance"* on a terrain composed *"of what remains of the factories, the neighborhoods, the schools, the social ghettos and all those situations in which class exclusion is manifested"*. For Bonanno it was the destructive aspect rather than the degree of consciousness provoked in the masses that establishes the standard by which the effectiveness of an action is judged. It goes without saying that the preferred form of action is sabotage, *"the classic weapon of all the excluded"* ("Another Turn of the Screw for Capitalism"), valid for all occasions and suitable for all ages. Sabotage is like desire, which has no schedule or dates on the calendar.

The analyses of social reality still comprise Bonanno's weak spot. He asserts the non-existence of a "factory mentality" and refers to the "de-skilling" of the individual, as well as the "pulverization" of the working class, which is why he considers any references to *"ridiculous dichotomies such as that between bourgeoisie and proletariat"* to be unfounded, only to immediately proceed to similar dichotomies derived from vulgar sociology: *"specific social reality ... always has one constant: the division of classes between dominators and dominated, between included and excluded."*

The dichotomies do not stop there, either, since he alludes to *"the conflict between rich and poor countries"* which takes the form or tends to take the form of national liberation struggles or wars of religion. This confrontation, caused by the inability of capitalism *"to resolve the economic problem of the poor countries"*, leads him to the discovery of positive aspects in nationalism and Islamic fundamentalism, whose manifestations throughout the Mediterranean lead him to the conclusion that the latter region will be the *"theater of social confrontations ... which could soon become generalised"*. By reading the newspapers, he convinced himself that he was an expert in geopolitics, since he imperturbably claims to demonstrate that in the Mediterranean countries *"conflict[s] worsening the present tensions ... [will take place] over the next few*

years"; he does not specify whether they will be conflicts between classes or states, most likely they will be both, but in any event these conflicts will have to be confronted with the most adequate practice, that of insurrectionism ("For an Anti-Authoritarian Insurrectionist International: Proposal for a Debate", 1993). In reality, Bonanno is referring to the Palestinian conflict, in which he has placed great hopes. As always, the armed struggle, having risen high enough to obtain a global viewpoint, remains in the clouds of third-worldism.

We say that the revolution in societies based on class antagonism will be carried out by the oppressed masses, rather than by formal or informal minorities. The organization will be the one that is produced by the social struggles, rather than one that is the product of activist voluntarism or propaganda. If the times are not mature this is because there are no conscious mass movements. For a lack of anything better one does what one can, but the absence of massive struggles can never be compensated for by activism on the part of a handful of groups. A strategic defense must consist in organizing the theater of the social war for the purpose of fighting the class enemy. This means liberating spaces for the development of consciousness in the masses; in other words, for the emergence of autonomous struggles. In a contrary sense, activism not only replaces these struggles but sets itself up as their radical spectacle, which is why, rather than assisting the resurgence of revolutionary protest, it lays the ground-work for its disarticulation. The incredible confusion of the insurrectionist theses was not acceptable, but the inconsistency and superficiality of these analyses never bothered Bonanno, who was possessed by a desire for action that he knew how to transmit to those anarchists disillusioned with the inactivity of the traditional organizations. These anarchists had become followers of his ideas in spite of all logic, since logic was not exactly his most characteristic means of attracting followers. Insurrectionism made headway in certain youth milieus not because of its lucidity or its theoretical superiority. Nor was its impact in these milieus the result of the efficacy of its actions, which were often seasoned with the bitter gall of prison and personal tragedy; much less was it due to its having transformed Bonanno's Mediterranean prophecy into a reality. The reasons for its relative success were of a psychological nature: for those who want action, it gave them action. Action was a kind of emotional discharge. Bonanno had noted that "*anarchism was a tension, not a realisation*" ("The Anarchist Tension", speech delivered in Cuneo, January 1995) and insisted on this fact. Bonanno described the attainment of anarchist consciousness as an "*insurrection of a personal nature ... that illumination which produces an idea-force inside us*", a kind of revelation that determined a way of life and not just a way of viewing things. It produced an intimate

liberation, the elevation to a state of anarcho-grace which helped one to free oneself from the bonds of the individual's environment:

"insurrectionism is a personal fact; each person must carry out an insurrection within himself, modify his own ideas, transform the reality that surrounds him, beginning with the family and the school, which are structures that keep us imprisoned..." (Interview with Bonanno on Radio Onda Rossa, November 20, 1997).

Anarchists, if they really want to be anarchists, must subject everything they do and think to daily examination, since what they do and what they think cannot be separated. Either "metaphysics" or anarchism, that is, action. Action thus acquires an existential dimension. An anarchist without action was like a garden without flowers, or like a soldier without a uniform. How could one stop if one was in a state of "permanent conflict"? Action became a moral criterion: one was a good or a bad anarchist depending on whether one engaged in action or did not. Bonannism, a peculiar version of the American "do it yourself" attitude translated into revolutionary terms, offered all the delights of the sectarian militant's lifestyle without any of its organic servitudes. The absence of real social movements was not a handicap but a precondition for insurrectionism: the illegal nature of its agitation rendered it advisable, for obvious reasons of security, to maintain a certain distance from prosaic labor among the masses. An extreme individualism called "autonomy", supported by a few passages from Stirner, shielded the professional anarchist from all criticism. The insurrectionist could then believe in the ointment regardless of irrelevance or the senselessness of his actions, since, being indifferent to the masses, he does not have to answer to anybody. He was the sole judge of himself. By an irony of history, the elderly Bonanno had survived his contradictions and deficiencies thanks to acne.

The Insurrectionist International met in Athens in the fall of 1996, shortly before or shortly after which Bonanno was imprisoned for belonging to an armed gang. In 1994 the forces of repression had also come to embrace the cause of action by carrying out arrests and staging media circus trials. "Anarchism" ceased publication, but in "Canenero", published in Florence, the various informal factions of the International briefly reconverged. The insurrectionists had overestimated the revolutionary possibilities of the Mediterranean countries and had underestimated the repressive capabilities of an over-equipped state. The most elementary strategy would have before all else called for posing the question: can insurrectionist practice survive the repression that would be immediately unleashed? Of course not. The Marini trial was the response of the Italian state to the sting of the insurrectionist fly. There were similar responses in Greece and Spain (Bonanno was no Fanelli:

insurrectionism made its debut in Spain in 1996 with the fiasco of the Cordoba hold-up). Bonanno was released from prison in October 1997. The disagreements between the various groups were accentuated by the outbreak of the predictable wave of repression. The International met for a second time somewhere in Italy and officially dissolved. Four years later the Marini trial concluded with harsh sentences for most of the defendants. In one way or another, however, the insurrectionists stood their ground and have not forgotten their prisoners. "Offer flowers to the rebels who failed", as Vanzetti said. Our criticisms do not prevent us from recognizing their courage and our disagreements do not constitute an obstacle to our demand for their liberation.

Miguel Amorós, March-August 2007

Written at the request of several comrades.

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"Anarquía profesional y desarme teórico
Sobre insurreccionalismo"

Miguel Amorós, *Desde abajo y desde fuera. Proyectiles*, editorial Brulot, 2007.

Nostalgia for Origins

“Undaunted youths, go, seek that mother earth
From which your ancestors derive their birth.
The soil that sent you forth, her ancient race
In her old bosom shall again embrace.”

Virgil, The Aeneid

The dissolution of all social bonds that are not reducible to transactions that bear within themselves the total reign of the commodity over human life arouses two kinds of reactions: one rational, and the other foreign to Reason. The first reaction was concretized in a radical democratism that broke with bourgeois liberalism to converge with a socialist anti-capitalism, with its first most incisive variant, in our view, being the anarchist naturist school. But the annihilation of memory that goes hand in hand with commodity colonization favors irrationality to the detriment of reflection and historical critique, and therefore it is also prejudicial to legitimate resistance to capital, especially when this irrationality is expressed among rural social groups, and is often manifested in sentimentalism, conservatism and religious traditionalism [*de manera ... ultramontana*]. Although the first tentative expressions of anti-capitalism often speak the language of religion, it is a struggle that only requires the consciousness of what it is actually doing in order to become revolutionary. The local impulse to rally around “the old laws”, tradition or the absolute monarchy, which responded to the same causes as the millenarian peasant revolts or the Luddite riots of the weavers and miners, occurred in various locations on the Iberian peninsula during the 19th century. The deepest roots of regional nationalism were embedded during this era, and in the case of the Basque Country they are quite evident, but nationalism properly speaking is manifested in very diverse ways in accordance with the class interests that use it as an ideological or political umbrella, depending on the specific weight of the proletariat and the degree of capitalist development that has been attained. At the present time, now that the process of industrialization has culminated in the transformation of society itself into one vast global industry, when the standardizing steamroller of mass culture has abolished differences, and when deracination is leading to nostalgia for lost identity, many are those who share the search for their “mother earth”, and nationalism, often mixed with other

ideologies, is coming to the fore. The question concerning what relation the nationalist polemic can maintain with projects for social emancipation has different answers depending on the type of nationalism involved and the specific historical moment. To begin with we can say that at the present time almost all identity-based nationalisms and patriotisms are in practice alternative political approaches for carrying out capitalist development, approaches that oppose central State regulation of capitalist development, which is why their relation with freedom and the end of oppression is nil. Precisely the most interesting part of nationalism, and the most progressive in the human sense, that of its romantic origins, that is, the defense of old customs and traditions, communitarian institutions, egalitarianism, the rejection of the industrialization process and, in general, everything that really sets it apart, is the ballast which is being jettisoned in favor of an extreme economic modernization that is supposed to set the standard for and provide the new pattern for development in less developed nations. Most contemporary nationalists do not want to defend their identity by preserving their territory from global financial flows, but instead seek to create a profitable local franchise that will attract those flows. The development of regional metropolitan systems as nodes of the networks of globalized capitalism provide them with the best secessionist arguments: the conurbation-State is the most adequate political form for economic globalization, the form that provides the highest profits. This nationalism therefore defends the interests of the local oligarchies that are intimately linked with world finance; the differences that distinguish various nationalist trends, to the degree that these differences have any meaning, respond to the variable impact of the emerging middle classes in their schemas, which are more or less oriented towards independence depending on the greater or lesser need for or fear of the central State power.

Nationalism is based on the assumption of the existence of a separate, homogeneous, ethnic population with its own interests, which speaks its own language, has its own culture and therefore constitutes a nation. By "historical right" it is supposed to be entitled to the development of its own sovereign institutions, the products of the popular will, in the framework of an independent State, with its parliament, its officials, its police, its army, its judges and its borders. We shall attempt to show that all of this is false. Everything that could define a people has long since ceased to exist and for that reason there is no popular will, either. The need for a national market created the central State, ruined the local non-capitalist economies and abrogated their laws. The rural areas were impoverished, their "historical" institutions were abolished, their popular folklore and traditions were lost together with all social relations

extraneous to the economy (relations based on reciprocity, mutual aid, the gift, redistribution, barter...), communal lands were confiscated, guilds were dissolved, classes arose, migratory movements were set in motion and, finally, the individual was uprooted from his community and thrown onto the market. In the transition from a pre-capitalist society to a capitalist society, populations were gradually standardized and homogenized, that is, transformed into a proletarianized social class. Any community or harmony of interests that might have been able to exist among the Estates of the Ancien Régime disappeared, erased by the capitalist intrusion into society. Economic interest dominated every other kind of interest, popular culture passed away and the popular language ceased to be used among the elites. Despite the meritorious cultural renaissances linked to the local intelligentsia or to bourgeois sectors in conflict with the State (due to the unequal development of the ruling classes), the process nonetheless continued, and with the appearance of mass culture, that is, of the spectacle, of generalized entertainment, of the mass media, etc., language lost its validity as a vehicle of culture and means of communication — any language — putting an end to its role as the last sign of surviving identity. The current institutionalization of culture and teaching of regional languages has the same effect as the erstwhile institutionalization of Castilian culture and the promotion of the national language: no language can be used to communicate. The modern conditions of existence prevent any serious communication; language and communication do not go hand in hand.

The uniformity achieved under capitalism means the end of peoples and nations. The real content of popular resistance to the implications of this standardization, that is, the resistance against the creation of a market for money, land and labor, was distorted by the local bourgeoisie and petty bourgeois by way of the contrivance of ethnic stereotypes and national myths, the manipulation of history and the invention of a spurious tradition amalgamated with folkloric residues. The nationalists need a Golden Age whence they can extract idyllic images and fabulous visions that serve as models for the patriotic imagination and their electorate. This is never enough, however, and the active presence of the militant proletariat, a new factor, forced the nationalist movements to define themselves with respect to the proletarian movement. There was no lack of individuals who discovered that the revolutionary working class was the only subject capable of resolving the problem of the national question. The proletariat, as “working people” and social majority, became the depository of the essence of the fatherland. In general, the diverse socialist tendencies reacted against this trend. The anarchists, for example, opposed national independence in the name of the unity of the proletariat, and opposed the formation of a new State in the name

of their principles. In its time, the CNT rejected the Catalan statute, despite the fact that the majority of its members had voted for the nationalist party, the ERC (the Catalan Republican Left), because the proposed new State was conceived in accordance with capitalist interests. The social revolution was real independence. Proletarian federalism went even beyond the statist secessionist movement, which diverted the attention of the workers and left exploitation as it was. The CNT recognized the “Catalan people”, but not the Catalan bourgeoisie; Catalonia was a country, but not a nationality. Nation and State were only artificial creations. Catalonia would be free only as a sum of federated municipalities, without borders, rather than as a State. The defense of the oppressed Catalan culture and language was perfectly compatible with the class struggle, for even though the proletariat is internationalist and has no fatherland — its fatherland is the world — it does have a language. Indeed, Catalonia was never more free than during those two and a half months when it was ruled by the Committee of Anti-fascist Militias, but this was not the kind of freedom that was desired by the diverse interests camouflaged under the flag of Catalanism, with the exception of those who were represented by the POUM. These interests were transformed during the civil war into the vanguard of the counterrevolution, excavating an abyss between the workers and Catalan nationalism that has yet to be bridged. The ephemeral resurgence of the workers movement in the sixties and seventies gave way once again to a socialistic nationalism, and even led to a certain type of anarcho-patriotism that hardly made any contribution to the identity debate and even less to libertarian theoretical renewal. The lure of lost roots caused the workers movement to fall into the trap of recovered “identity”, endorsing with greater or lesser enthusiasm the most suspect nationalist paraphernalia, neo-folklore, flags, anthems, [linguistic and cultural] “normalization” and subsidized culture, all of it presented by the local oligarchy as the recovery of national identity, while it is actually nothing but the obligatory supplementary curriculum for the subject who desires to prosper in the new political framework.

Today — in the Iberian peninsula and, more generally, in the countries where modern conditions of production and consumption prevail — there are no peoples, and to prove this we shall note the decline of the birth rate of the native population, the indisputable aging of the population and the flood of immigrants that maintains the level of exploitation that the functioning of the economy requires. Nor are there any specific places or landscapes; unrestricted urbanization has merged the countryside with the city by destroying both and scattering over the surface of the land a single predatory model of territorial occupation. Constant mobility has done the rest. There are no more real roots, or particular ethnicities, or national interests, or any greater identity than the one that is disseminated by

the generalized uniform way of life. Under the absolute rule of capital, amidst the full-blown globalization of the economy, what causes people to resemble one another, regardless of their background, is much greater than what sets them apart. The levels of consumption or the degree of repression may vary, but the standardizing tendencies are increasingly erasing any and all differences. In a manner of speaking, everyone will end up either singing along with the “Macarena” or hating it. Even racial mixing and mixed race children are the inadvertent result of the planetary rule of finance. There are more than fifty languages spoken in every conurbation. The national interest is nothing but the interest of international capital represented in the “national” territory by its political-economic oligarchy. Only the oppressed are a nation. Does this mean that nationalist demands are reactionary? Not necessarily; at least not in their anti-capitalist and anti-centralist tendency. Not as the historic reference to a life outside the market and separate from the bourgeois State. It is reactionary, however, as bourgeois mystification and an alibi for leaders. It is reactionary as spectacle. The struggle against the oppression of the tide of globalization is essentially a local struggle and a struggle for the reassertion of local rights, but everywhere it is the same; freedom must start from the bottom, concretizing in local forms, direct relations, communities speaking their own languages, and this, without deviating from the cosmopolitan exigencies, will lead us to the real discovery of the past. This does not involve a return to the past, or disinterring an extinguished society, or giving life to a mummified people, forgetting about the rest of the world. It is not a return of the kind recommended by the god Apollo to Aeneas in our quotation from Virgil. It is rather a matter of recovering memory, identifying the point where society first took its demented turn, discovering in the old wisdom and the old collective practices of the peoples, but not only in them, the forms of a lost freedom, with the intention of availing ourselves of them in our modern anti-capitalist battles. It is in this historical connection between past and present, between local experience and the polyglot reality, that, in order to orient ourselves by real radical struggles — struggles that go to the root — we shall all have to find the signs of our future identity.

Miguel Amorós, October 18, 2007.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“La nostalgia de los orígenes”

When Capitalism Goes Green

Ever since capitalism made its appearance on this planet it has done nothing but destroy the natural environment in order to forge its own environment where it has evolved and forced individuals to adapt to it. Science and technology acquired a decisive impulse and were fully developed thanks to the resistance offered to this adaptation, so that capitalism not only has been able to overcome all obstacles but these obstacles have been systematically transformed into opportunities for its own expansion. Growth, deeply ingrained in its nature, will not cease as long as exploitable humanity exists, and that is precisely the new challenge that capitalism is facing. As the productive system expands it becomes more and more destructive. The colonization by the commodity of land and life, of space and time, cannot be stopped without a questioning of its fundamental principles, nor can it continue without endangering the existence of the human species itself. As a result, the ecological crisis leads to the social crisis. Capitalism must continue to grow to prevent this from happening, but must do so without allowing the degradation that accompanies this growth from penetrating the consciousness of those affected by it. To accomplish this it must improvise economic, technological and political measures that simultaneously dissimulate its outrages and allow people to live with and make the best of them. Production and consumption, as the experts would say, face a “paradigm shift”. Consumption habits, along with business and political activity, must be carried out in a different way, not, obviously, to save nature, or even to preserve the species, but to save capitalism itself. This is why the politicians’ hearts have turned green. This is why capitalism is going environmental.

The first awakening of ecological consciousness took place long ago. Already in 1955, Murray Bookchin warned against the health hazards of food additives, and in 1962 he and Rachel Carson exposed the harmful effect of pesticides. The abundance promised by capitalism was revealed to be a poisonous abundance.

“The crisis is being heightened by massive increases in air and water pollution; by a mounting accumulation of nondegradable wastes, lead residues, pesticide residues and toxic additives in food; by the expansion of cities into vast urban belts; by increasing stresses due to congestion, noise and mass living; and by the wanton scarring of the earth as a result of mining operations, lumbering, and real estate speculation. As a result, the earth has been despoiled in a few decades on a scale that is unprecedented in the entire history of human habitation of the planet. Socially,

bourgeois exploitation and manipulation have brought everyday life to the most excruciating point of vacuity and boredom. As society has been converted into a factory and a marketplace, the very rationale of life has been reduced to production for its own sake — and consumption for its own sake.” (*Post-Scarcity Anarchism*, Second Edition, Black Rose Books, Montreal, 1986, p. 58.)

The depopulation of the countryside, the food industry, the chemicalization of life and the urban leprosy imposed a consumerist, brutalizing, egotistical and neurotic model of life, immersed in an artificial and atomizing environment. Summarizing an era of revolts — the black ghetto in America, the British pacifist movement, the Dutch Provos, the German youth movement, May ’68, etc. — Guy Debord pointed out that:

“Pollution and the proletariat are now the two concrete sides of the *critique of political economy*. The universal development of the commodity has been verified entirely as the accomplishment of political economy, that is to say as the ‘renunciation of life’. At the moment when everything has entered the sphere of economic goods, even the water of springs and the air of towns, everything has become *economic evil*. The simple immediate sensation of the “nuisances” and the dangers, more oppressing every quarter, which attack first of all and principally the great majority, that is to say the poor, already constitutes an immense factor of revolt, a vital exigency of the exploited, just as *materialist* as was the struggle of the workers in the nineteenth century for the means to eat. Already the remedies for the ensemble of ills which production creates, at this stage of its commodity wealth, are too expansive for it. Production relations and productive forces have at last reached a point of radical incompatibility, for the existing social system has bound its fate to the pursuit of a literally insupportable deterioration of all the conditions of life.” (“Theses on the Situationist International and Its Time”, in *The Veritable Split in the International*, B.M. Chronos, London, 1990. Originally published in French by ed. Champ Libre, Paris, 1972.)

Although the approach to the class struggle was posed in exact historical terms, capitalism’s ability to survive its catastrophes was underestimated, while the capacity of historical consciousness to become a subversive force was overestimated. Thus, while the works of Mumford, Charbonneau, Russell, Ellul and Bookchin went almost totally unnoticed, and ecological awareness remained trapped in mysticism or reformism, far removed from an indifferent proletariat, capitalism overcame its quantitative contradictions with a bold leap forward, developing a nuclear power industry, expanding automobile production, creating a new generation of more dangerous pesticides, flooding the market with lethal chemical products and spewing thousands of tons of gaseous pollutants into the atmosphere. When, during the following decade, these solutions led to catastrophes like Chernobyl, Seveso, Bophal, the Toxic Oil Syndrome — produced by organophosphates but attributed to rapeseed oil —

the hole in the ozone layer and global climate change, not to speak of the destruction of much of the earth's surface due to urbanization and tourism, there was hardly any opposition and the environmentalist movement that emerged soon became an accomplice of capitalism and the renovator of its politics. The leaders of the economy and the State, reflecting upon the catastrophic consequences of their management, were undaunted and chose to become champions of the struggle against the disaster and, with the help of experts and ecologists, proclaimed an ecological state of emergency, that is, a war economy mobilizing all resources, both natural and manmade, and placed them at the service of global economic development, incorporating the environmental cost, or the price of rebuilding the landscape and the necessary expenses to establish a bearable level of degradation. The *Encyclopédie des Nuisances* based its activities on the exposure of this facelift to give domination an ecological alibi:

“Ecologism is the principle agent of censorship of the social critique latent in the struggle against harmful phenomena, that is, of the illusion according to which the results of alienated labor can be condemned without attacking alienated labor itself and the society based upon the exploitation of labor. Now that all the politicians have become ecologists, the ecologists do not hesitate to declare themselves supporters of the State. ...

The ecologists play the same role, on the terrain of the struggle against harmful phenomena, that the trade unionists play on the terrain of workers struggles: mere intermediaries interested in the preservation of the contradictions whose regulation they assure; smooth-tongued negotiators adept at haggling (in this case the for the revision of the rules and rates of environmental damage replace the percentages of wage increases); mere defenders of the quantitative at the very moment when the economic calculus is extended to new domains (air, water, human embryos, synthetic sociability); they are, ultimately, the new commissars of submission to the economy, whose price must now include the cost of “a quality environment”. One can already discern the outlines of a redistribution of territory between sacrificed zones and protected zones, jointly administered by “green” experts, a spatial division that will regulate the hierarchical access to the commodity called nature.” (*Address to Those who would rather Abolish Harmful Phenomena than Manage Them*)

The effort to optimize global resources materialized in things like genetic engineering in agriculture, mad cow disease and the avian flu; in fact, the ecological state of emergency exposed by the EdN transformed the planet into an immense laboratory for technological and scientific experimentation, and its entire population into guinea pigs. The catastrophe lost its national character and with globalization escaped from the framework of the State. The ecological crisis could not be restricted to certain super-industrialized zones and called for a global response. This led to the convening of the various environmental

summits which, between 1988 and 1997, established guidelines for capitalist development for the years to come: Toronto, Río de Janeiro, Copenhagen and Kyoto. From these summits creative formulas emerged for salvaging development and fighting climate change without changing the prevailing system: Agenda 21, sustainable development, social development, local development. ... Pure contradictions in terms, since development is never local, social or sustainable, because capitalism never functions in the interest of any locality, of the oppressed or of nature. But what the leaders of the world economy did make clear was that no developmentalist euphemism, even if it is based on modern technologies, can function without political and social measures capable of reeducating the population in the new habits of consumption that will make them profitable, since it is the massive adoption of these technologies that will reduce the costs of their application and stimulate private economic interests to invest accordingly. The fight against climate change could be objectively favored by the unstoppable rise in the price of oil and other fossil fuels, but it is up to the “public powers”, that is, the politicians, at least during the first stage, to promote environmentally-friendly business by forcing the population to consume products and services that are certified as “environmentally-friendly”, or by imposing a “new tax policy” that reconciles “the culture of private enterprise” with nature and which punishes the old polluting habits and the squandering of energy, which were normal until now, but are now punishable for the good of the economy. In this way, the State, the parties, international institutions, and to a lesser extent the “social forums”, the NGOs and the sustainability “think-tanks”, play the role of regulatory mechanisms, auxiliaries of the world market, a role which they had lost during the early stages of globalization. At one stroke, the control over the production of cement, fertilizers or synthetic fibers, the recycling of wastes, the construction of new nuclear power plants, desalinization plants or golf courses, investments in renewable energy or the cultivation of crops for bio-fuel production, become political decisions. At the same time, all economic and political leaders discover they are ecologists. Insulation, energy-saving light bulbs, new guidelines for manufacturing automobile engines and, in general, the restructuring of every kind of activity, require enormous financial commitments not accompanied by the requisite profitable returns, for which the market therefore cannot assume responsibility. It then becomes the job of the State and the political bureaucracy to lend a hand.

The ecological concerns of the world's leaders conform to the total commodification of the planet provoked by capital's constant need for expansion. The devastation caused by the expansion of production is of such a

magnitude that regulatory control is required not only for the means of production and the productive forces, but also for the land, culture and history, flora and fauna, water and air, light and heat, all of which are now “resources”, that is, raw materials for tertiary activities and productive forces of a new kind. The institutional revitalization that is required by the transformation of the production process and “energy security” have rejuvenated the fortunes of the State party, that is, the political administrative bureaucracy, and this term includes more than just the conglomeration of social democrats, neo-stalinists, greens and civil society groups. An open reformism is being constructed as a fashionable doctrine that is accepted even by the conservatives and rightists, because the whole world understands that the delayers and foot-draggers must be forced into line, the onset of the catastrophe must be postponed and a breathing space must be created for the economy. As opposed to a negative capitalism that does not want to freeze development by way of emissions controls, a suspiciously altruistic capitalism presents the human face of destruction, speaking of sustainability and education for civic responsibility, of responsible consumption and energy efficiency, rooftop solar panels and green taxes, without restricting highway construction, high speed rail development or urban depredations. Traditional development vs. environmentalist development. Evidently, the costs of domination have skyrocketed with pollution, global warming and peak oil, a predicament that the market cannot solve the way it did in the past. Nor is the expansion of the environmental remediation sector of the economy sufficient. The survival of capitalism requires a general mobilization on a local, national and international scale, of all the leaders in favor of a conversion of social and labor exploitation, and in favor of a lifestyle subordinated to the imperatives of the new style of consumption; the State as a mechanism of coercion again becomes profitable. That is the charter of eco-capitalism and its leftist and rightist servants. It is entirely possible that the reconversion process may encounter serious resistance from the population that will suffer its effects, for which reason appropriate forms of social control will have to be designed, beginning with the schools, the communications media, social welfare programs, etc., as well as the police and the army. Capitalism and the bureaucracy have no ideals to realize, but an order to defend, on the local and global scale. For them the problems of foreign policy and social conflict are directly security issues, which must ultimately be resolved *manu militari*. Eco-fascism will most likely be the political form of the new ecological reign of the commodity.

In the absence of serious struggles, or, which amounts to the same thing, in the absence of historical consciousness, alongside the pseudo-reformists who

sell us their “pragmatism” and their “small victories” in the matter of institutional politics and the capitalist model, real utopians are making their appearance who speak to us of “conviviality”, because for them the remedy for so much evil must not come by way of a liberation struggle but through the peaceful application of a miraculous formula, in this case “curtailment of economic growth”. The means to this end will not result from a conflict generated by the antagonism of one sector of the population with industrial and consumer society as a whole, but from a series of particular convivial initiatives, with good vibes, wherever possible institutionally encouraged and defended by parties, “networks” or NGOs, which will have the virtue of convincing people of the advantages of seceding from the economy. The proponents of “curtailing economic growth” distrust revolutionary methods: above all, this is so that nothing will happen. And nothing can happen since capitalism tolerates a certain degree of self-exclusion in the society it colonizes, because a good part of the world population is in fact excluded from the market and lives on the margin of economic laws. It can even derive profits from this voluntary exclusion through mutual aid programs, alternative tourism and subsidies. This is what the experts call the economy of the “third sector”. What is at stake, however, is not the gradual modification of the margins of capitalist society, but the creation of a new society. The transformation of the world, not taking refuge in isolated pockets. And for this to happen conflict must emerge with force and spread, so that society splits into two irreconcilable factions. One faction wants to abolish the relations of production and consumption, put an end to the exploitation of labor and liberate everyday life, preserve the land and return to a state of equilibrium with nature. The other faction seeks to defend the industrial and developmentalist status quo at any price. No convivial program can solve the problems that capitalism brings in its wake, because a commitment to peaceful methods prevents the ecological crisis from becoming a social crisis, when just the opposite is required, that is, the rope of oppression that holds together the various social sectors must be stretched to its limit in order to provoke an irreparable social breach. When the victims of capitalism decide to adapt life to human conditions controlled by all and set up their counter-institutions, then the time will come for transformative programs and the real autonomous experiences that will restore social and natural equilibriums and reestablish communities on free foundations. A libertarian society can only be created by way of a libertarian revolution.

Miguel Amorós.

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“Cuando el capitalismo se vuelve ecologista”

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The day they killed José Pellicer

On June 8, 1942 they shot the brothers José and Pedro Pellicer Gandía. That day, so tragic for their families, friends and comrades, was, however, just another day in the first years of the Francoist regime, characterized by physical annihilation as a political weapon and state terrorism as a method of government. We would be entirely justified to speak of genocide, since what took place was not the simple execution of opponents, but the elimination, by means of summary proceedings accompanied by every kind of mistreatment and humiliation, of a significant part of the population, which was considered to be hostile, and sympathetic to the republican cause. If we consider the cruel repression meted out to the working class in particular, and especially to those proletarians who played a leading role in the revolutionary events, the Francoist genocide was not as atavistic as a certain postwar literature and the propagandists of the transition to democracy would have us believe. The atrocities and suffering, usually inflicted in a mechanical and routine manner, were not the result of a strange irrationality or a mania on the part of the leaders, they conformed to the same rationality that rules social destiny to this day, although in a less brutal way. This rationality was economic rationality. It was a rescue operation for the bourgeoisie, a counterrevolution; an abrupt step in the process of capitalist modernization that necessarily entailed a cost in human lives: the massacre of the rural and urban proletariat. The result was not a fascist state, but a capitalist state under martial law that utilized fascist means. And it was precisely capitalist development that, by rendering those means obsolete, caused the Francoist apparatus to be reconciled with the surviving opposition, and those who defeated the proletariat in 1937 made peace with those who decimated it in 1939, those who attempted to kill Pellicer in the Plaza Tetuán in Valencia reached an understanding with those who shot him down in the prison courtyard at Paterna.

For obvious reasons this national reconciliation, as the PCE called it, or the reform agreement, as the liberal Francoists called it, was established on the basis of the most absolute amnesia regarding not only the genocide but also the repression that accompanied the regime up to its last day. The corpses are still in their graves, wherever they are buried, and the victims are still anonymous, and there are few left to seek justice for them. History was concealed behind an

oath of silence, as if the tens of thousands of deaths were the result of a chance accident, a contingent event that should not be recalled, a macabre lottery. The real memory of the civil war and Francoism was declared closed and court was adjourned: this coincided with amnesia. The changes would not affect those lying under the ground. The attack on memory and the mutilation of the collective memory laid the basis for the legitimization of the new hybrid regime that called itself a “democracy”. This regime contrasted itself to the previous one in the name of certain “democratic values” that were restored by means with which we are quite familiar. Its ideologues whitewashed it by projecting its darkest aspects into the past, as if, with the end of Francoism, all “anti-democratic” methods had also come to an end. A mere glance at the administrative authoritarianism, the parliamentary circus, the disappearance of the public space, the infamous working conditions, the treatment of immigrants, the servile posture of the trade unions, the dismantling of even the most insignificant mechanisms for political participation or oversight, the enormous technical development of social control, consumerist brutalization, totalitarian urbanism, and finally, the increasing harshness of the laws and prisons, are enough to demonstrate the existence of links between Franco’s dictatorship and the televised “democracy”, and even to reveal the existence of a specifically “democratic” barbarism, which does not resort to the physical liquidation of the opposition because it possesses more subtle procedures for neutralizing it.

The new regime that came into existence in 1977 turned history over to the professionals, so that they could select that which it was appropriate to recall and smooth over the contradictions that could not be concealed. The history of this regime is the history of its acts of amnesia, and the latter provide an index of its complicity with the executioners. It all came to a culmination almost forty years later with a law to put a period on that sentence, called the “law of historical memory”. This law nullified any legal possibility of a review for litigation, allowing for a rhetorical and sentimental rehabilitation, and an inoffensive happy ending with its ephemeral emotional discharge. Just what the victims did not need, since the horror of the past is not something that can be ameliorated with distance and escapism. These deaths were characterized by the fact that they are and they will be irreplaceable, they had names, ideas and passions, a life, a history.... Some were anarchists and revolutionaries like Pellicer. All of their deaths constitute a wound inflicted on memory that cannot and must not be healed because its memory fills a signal place in the understanding of and the commitment to fight against barbarism. Any reflection on his martyrdom must always be accompanied by a commitment to

never allow it to be integrated into the ideology of power and thus be used to legitimize power. Their deaths cannot form part of the established order. The memory of the victims is not past; it is present. It is not commiseration and sadness; it is determination and combat. In order not to betray their memory we have to contemplate the development of historical struggles from the perspective of the victims. Only the perspective of the victims will prevent their Calvary from being attributed to a bit of bad luck, or worse yet, to a stage in the process of transformation leading to the prevailing form of domination, since it is not hard to discern the features of the disaster that befell the victims in modern afflictions and the unhappiness of so many lives sabotaged by the economic violence of capital and the bureaucratic oppression of the existing institutions.

José Pellicer, who participated in the reorganization of the Valencian FAI and was a combatant of the CNT construction workers trade union, who freed prisoners, who helped found the Iron Column, who was imprisoned by the SIM, who was the commander of the 83rd Mixed Brigade, who was a victim of Franco and a libertarian: as long as yearnings for justice arise among the oppressed your memory will have a profound meaning! *Salud!*

The day they killed José Pellicer was a day just like today.

Miguel Amorós, June 8, 2008.

Source: LibCom.org

Original text:

“El día que mataron a José Pellicer”

Theoretical anarchism and anarchist ideology

“When reflection, feeling or whatever other form the subjective consciousness may assume, regards the present as vanity, and thinks itself to be beyond it and wiser, it finds itself in emptiness, and, as it has actuality only in the present, it is vanity throughout.”

Hegel, *Philosophy of Right*.

Defeats are favorable for the inventory clerks with their inevitable conclusions; it is true that the owl of Minerva takes flight at night; but it is no less true that due to its injuries it does not always fly high enough to perch on the highest vantage point, and often remains at ground level, struggling among the weeds. The conditions of the defeats, the profound demoralization of defeat, the impossible hopes fostered by an exasperated survival instinct, contaminate reflection and prevent the necessary distancing from the events that would allow for judgments that reach objective conclusions and suggest a different historical conduct. Something along these lines took place in Spanish anarchism after 1939. During the 1940s, in exile or in jail, its supporters found themselves facing the same fork in the road that social democracy had faced a half century before: reform or revolution.

Some — and by no means the least numerous — claim that anarchism had always been negative, and the moment then arrived for it to engage in positive creation over the short term, however limited it might have been, and that this somehow meant a radical change of course. Activity no longer had to be directed towards a frontal attack against the ruling class but, instead, towards political and economic collaboration with its institutions, such as was the case during the revolutionary civil war and was still the case for six years afterwards in exile. The purpose of activity was no longer to capture territory from the bourgeoisie but to penetrate, and to develop our project in, its territory. According to the reformist alternative, anarchism was acceptable as an idea but not as a method, good as a “philosophy of life” but not as praxis based on the “apprehension of the present and the real”: an abstract ideal separated from prosaic everyday activity and merely accompanying it as a decorative illusion. As if ideals were “too excellent to enjoy reality or even too powerless to incorporate it” and had to limit themselves “to be compelled to be alone and not

to be so effectively" (Hegel). But the problem for the revisionists was not "the idea", but "reality". And if, in the difficult circumstances of the postwar years, revolutionary anarchism had very few opportunities for practical engagement as long as the paramount concern in Spain was survival, not even revisionism had enough room for maneuver, which is why it was only manifested in useless compromises with the inoperative institutions in exile or with the pretender to the throne, in the political programs it pursued, whether the bourgeois constitution of 1931, or the parliamentary monarchy, and various party projects, although there were also those who pursued this policy to its logical conclusion, and collaborated with Franco's regime. On the opposing side, it was claimed that institutional collaboration was the result of exceptional circumstances and was a complete failure, and contributed to the final disaster; it would have been so much better to stay faithful to apoliticism even at the price of remaining isolated, for if defeat was inevitable, it would have been better to fall with honor, in defense of one's ideals, rather than in defense of the State. This fraction sought to impose the restoration of the "principles, tactics and goals" of the libertarian movement in order to fight to return to "the conquests of July 19". The "purist" fraction, which was just as compromised by republican politics as its opponents, avoided going into details about the real motivations for this 180 degree reversal in its organic conduct, nor did it specify just how these conquests would be resurrected, nor did it specify how these principles were to be restored. Its supporters did not say one word about how the unitary trade unions were to function in the clandestine conditions of a totalitarian regime, or about how to implement direct action, the struggle against the State or the revolutionary insurrection against Francoism. This neo-orthodoxy was prepared for neither a critical reassessment of the political and military policies it pursued during the civil war, nor was it prepared to condescend to engage practically with the appalling reality of the dictatorship. For the "purists", action did not seem to be a problem, since no one's life was at stake and there was really nothing to gain, it was just a matter of hiding behind one's principles, which comprised an arsenal that was fully stocked with every possible justification. If one's principles are contradicted by reality, so much the worse for reality. By following this path anarchism was only expressed in rhetoric, inhibition and immobilism, or at most in some kind of insane adventurism. If the action engaged in by revisionists became more and more repellent, action evaporated altogether for the purists. In one, the idea was transformed into a backdrop for bourgeois politics; in the other, it ascends into the heaven of lost causes. For some, anarchism was just another kind of private morality with which one can somehow confront the vulgarity of everyday

politics; for others, it constituted a faith with which one consoles oneself for the evils of the world, a creed to defend themselves from their Judases from the heights of their ivory tower. In both cases, it was an ideology.

Anarchism therefore ceased to be the intellectual expression of the most advanced sector of the workers movement on the peninsula, a product of the class struggle and a theory of this struggle. It forfeited this status because its content was no longer reality — at that time, the reality of defeat, of retreat and the annihilation of the workers movement. It no longer needed to understand reality in its bitter condition of regression, in order to discover the correct way to act within it and thus to transform it according to the goals of anarchism by applying the specific methods of anarchism. Anarchism disappeared as a material force in order to become a label, a catechism, and a ghetto. A creature that was half church, half party. It was no longer an idea based on a practice which it developed rather than contradicted, a social critique rooted in the material conditions of existence of the proletariat, and became instead something trivial, accidental, contingent, and consequently unreal. A utopia, a dream, and an illusion; something that cannot serve the general interests of the class. The main difference between theoretical anarchism — reflection within anarchism — and the anarchist ideology, lies in the separation of ideas and practice, ends and means, consciousness and action. Ideology is simultaneously the separate power of ideas and the ideas of separate power. In the Spanish case, ideas were “principles” or “circumstances”, depending on how you looked at it, and the separate power was the Organization, its Plenums, and a complex bureaucratic routine. The latter is rooted in the confusion of the part with the whole, of the moment with the process, of tactical questions with strategic considerations, as has been demonstrated, for example, by the municipalist, primitivist and insurrectionist ideologies. The concept of ideology derives from the concept of religion, the criticism of which the Young Hegelians pronounced to be “the prerequisite of all criticism”. Religion, like ideology in general, is the inverted consciousness of the world. The world of ideology is a world seen upside down, and you have to turn your head upside down to understand it. Reality, the truth of this world, must be discovered in concrete material life, in transformative human activity; in the concrete, and in labor, not outside of it. The young Marx called everything that was not a productive force, everything that took place outside of the economy and did not have an economic origin, ideology. Ideology was formed of fantasies with which human beings, in a society that was insufficiently developed, explained their essential forces, and their potential. It was born of the dissatisfaction with a limited praxis, due to the fact that techno-economic progress had not yet affected all aspects of life.

According to the Marxist point of view, ideology will tend to disappear with the full development of the productive forces, that is, with the development of the greatest productive force, the proletariat, whose objective living conditions will impose the realism that will liquidate the phantoms that stand between the workers and their real lives. The dissolution of ideological prejudices was for the worker an exigency of his immediate reality.

Carrying this reasoning one step further, some of Marx's disciples (Plekhanov, Rosa Luxemburg, Maurín) characterized anarchism as the ideology typical of an insufficiently developed proletariat. It is very easy to recognize the simple-mindedness that informs such reasoning, because it is more correct to say that the generalization of the proletarian condition goes hand in hand with the supreme development of ideology. The world of the commodity and automated technology is the world turned completely upside down. The experience of the workers movement is sufficient to prove the persistence of ideology, the veil of false representations that the bureaucrats easily cast over proletarianized life. The critique of ideology may be complemented thanks to psychoanalysis, which successfully connected it with various forms of degradation of the personality, such as character neurosis, schizophrenia and false consciousness in general, explaining ideological phenomena like racism, authoritarianism or militantism. At certain moments or during certain eras, when there were living proofs of emancipatory thought, a reflection so to speak, to use the words of Proudhon, that originates in action and returns to action, in other words, when there were revolutionaries, Marxism and anarchism supplied the proletariat with an adequate knowledge of society and kept it outside bourgeois politics, thus allowing it to make history. On the other hand, the revolutionary creations of the workers, the factory committees, the unitary trade unions and the workers councils, were places where abstract ideas and concrete practice converged, places where these theories became really working class theories and the workers became theoreticians. At other moments and during other eras, when anarchism as well as socialism had become ideologies serving spurious ends, ends fitting for a parasitic bureaucracy or evasive or submissive behavior, they were responsible for the eclipse of the workers' class consciousness and for the dead ends of the workers' practice. Thus, the critique of ideology, the secularized religion, is still the prerequisite of all critique.

At the high point of Fordist capitalism, reflection on the current validity of the lessons of Proudhon, Bakunin, Kropotkin, Reclus or Malatesta did not make much sense. None of them could have foreseen just how closely related the development of the productive forces, the colonization of everyday life and the counterrevolution would prove to be. The anarchist theoreticians must be

considered as merely so many contributors to the long line of precursors, founders and continuators of revolutionary socialist thought, just like Marx, Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, Pannekoek, Reich, Benjamin and Fourier, to name just a few. One aspect of the old anarchism that is especially susceptible to criticism is its excessive confidence in the insurrectionary spontaneity of the proletarian and peasant masses, its oscillations between ultra-legalist tactics and propaganda of the deed or expropriations, its inability to forge alliances with other working class sectors, its perpetual temptation to engage in politics, its lack of a clear strategy, its organizational confusionism, etc. Any attempt to reestablish an anarchist doctrine — a system — with fragments of ideas taken out of context would only be a reactionary utopia. Certain aspects of anarchism, however, still preserve their subversive efficacy and negativity, which could still find an application even though social conditions have changed and circumstances are different. Such are the critiques of the State and of parliamentarism, of parties and science, not to forget its love of freedom and its contributions to educational theory, public health and sexology. It reached its highest point of practical realization during the Spanish Revolution, but defeat transformed its practical theoretical postulates into ideologies.

During the 1960s no sincere revolutionary could avoid criticizing anarchist ideology and its representatives. The reconstruction of radical thought and revolutionary action occurred by way of a break with the world of anarchism. I have referred to this as the anarchist critique of real anarchism, although it would have been better to call it 'unreal', that is, 'ideological' anarchism, since only the rational is properly real. This critique was eminently negative, first of all, and was also applied to the Revolution of 1936. For the sixties witnessed a surge of a disrespectful anarchism that immediately clashed with not just the traditional left but also with the guardians of the temple of anarchy. This critique had to confront new problems deriving from the living conditions of late capitalism, problems which could not be clarified by an exclusive study of the classical texts: anti-colonial struggles, Maoism, the Hungarian Revolt, self-management, art in everyday life, mass culture, nuclear weapons, the pollution and destruction of the natural environment, concentrated urbanism, the role of technology and automation, the automobile, consumer society, sexual repression, women's liberation, the question of violence, etc. The immensity of the task of critique made its debut with attempts to reconcile Marx and Bakunin, that is, to utilize Marxist analysis from anti-authoritarian positions, a somewhat simplistic formulation, which could easily end up in a libertarian Marxist ideology of the kind articulated by Guérin and Rubel. What was needed was contemporary relevance with regard to subversion and a new critique of

politics, and therefore, with regard to many other factors — in the field of sociology, philosophy, historiography, art, etc. — but, above all, there was a need for learning to live intensely. First, there was an attempt to reaffirm the class struggle, by denouncing the police function of the trade unions and parties that had mobilized against the new forms of action (absenteeism, wildcat strikes, sabotage, theft) and organization (committees, assemblies, picket lines, coordinating committees, councils). Second, by extending the range of action of these new forms of action to the terrain of everyday life (neighborhood struggles, rejection of work, of the family, of religion and military service, the expropriation of photocopying machines, food or books, counterculture, rock, marijuana, subjectivity, adventures, squatters, communes). The theoretical labor of the Situationist International was the first (and only) generalized modern critique of class society, and was soon confirmed by a series of revolts, that is, the Dutch *Provos*, the *Zengakuren*, the revolt of the American blacks, the French May, the abortive revolution of the workers and soldiers in Portugal and the Italian movement of 1977. We cannot say that it was complete, because it was not the result of all the preceding theoretical efforts and therefore did not contain the principles of all of them, since it overlooked some fundamental themes like the critique of instrumental reason or the ecological question, not to speak of its superficial critique of anarchism, but it was the most highly developed and concrete critique of its time. Everywhere, the same anti-authoritarian spirit was expressed, the same profound demand for freedom, the same project of the passionate reconstruction of everyday life that the S.I. expressed better than anyone else. And capitalism rapidly began to remake itself from head to foot, often utilizing the arguments and weapons of its enemies. In the countries where remnants of working class anarchist traditions survived, anarchism burst forth as a spontaneous and largely emotional response to the new servitudes imposed by capitalism, and it came face to face with the walls of ideology and the rage of its defenders. It was not a generational conflict; it was a reflection of the renewed class struggle. Under the prevailing conditions of modernity, the ideological ghetto and its old customs had become part of capitalism, and played the role of inoffensive ruins: it had to die so that the new revolutionary generations could live. The anarchist ghetto had more in common with the prevailing values than it did with the new rebels, which is why it was so indistinguishable from the political milieu and was so easily accommodated there. The role performed by the anarchists with respect to “the defense of freedom” or the consolidation of “democracy” has often been irreverently pointed out. The irony of history shows us a few old libertarians satisfied with closing ranks with the bourgeoisie. In Spain, where this tradition

was more important than anywhere else and where the repression imposed by the dictatorship kept the contradictions of ideology crystallized, the fight between the old and the new — and between orthodox and revisionist — reached the level of a pitched battle. The “relaunching” of the CNT took place in 1976 outside of the workplaces, that is, at the margin of the workers movement. It was therefore not an expression of the nascent class struggle, but the product of a series of meetings between heterogeneous groups that were not involved with the assemblies of strikers but which did have a common denominator: the desire to build a trade union federation that could contend with the Workers Commissions for preeminence in separate class representation. The presence of organizations like “*Solidaridad*” and the admission of the “*cincopuntistas*”²⁰, and other riff-raff involved with the vertical trade unions clearly indicated that the kind of syndicalism the CNT had in mind was not very different from the other choices on offer. In conformance with these plans, those who reestablished the CNT did not concern themselves with the crucial dilemmas of the workers assembly movement; instead, they wanted to set up their recruiting booth, that is, a sufficient bureaucratic structure (the regional and national committees, the permanent secretary, union cards, plenums) and they sought an alliance with the UGT²¹ and the USO²² in order to get a piece of the pie that the Workers Commissions had tried to keep for themselves: the control of the labor market. The demands for “trade union freedom” and for the dismantling of the CNS²³, along with the debate over legalization, were the highlights of the first period of the reconstructed CNT. The latter not only ignored the revolutionary possibilities of the moment, possibilities that would dissipate due to a lack of progress with regard to clarification and action, but also helped deliver the coup de grâce to the assembly movement by way of its adherence, *de jure* or *de facto*, to the COS²⁴ call for a general strike on November 12, which marked the culminating point of the autonomous mobilizations and the beginning of the all-out trade union counteroffensive. However, the failure of the workers’ efforts at self-

²⁰ A faction of the CNT that precipitated a split in the confederation in 1966 after its members began to participate in the Francoist “vertical unions” together with the Communists and the progressive Catholics — translator’s note.

²¹ *Unión General de Trabajadores*, the Socialist trade union confederation — translator’s note.

²² *Unión Sindical Obrera*, the “Workers Trade Unionist Confederation”, a Catholic-Socialist trade union founded in 1960 — translator’s note.

²³ *Centrales Nacional-Sindicalistas*, “National-Syndicalist Trade Union Federations”, Francoist corporatist-collaborationist trade union federations — translator’s note.

²⁴ *Coordinadora de Organizaciones Sindicales*, “Coordinating Committee of Trade Union Organizations”, a federation formed in 1976 by the Workers Commissions, the USO and the UGT — translator’s note.

organization — the aborted transformation of the assemblies into workers councils — attracted many fighters to the CNT who did not accept the bureaucratic and pusillanimous trade unionism that was in store for them, in the vain hope of finding horizontal structures of mutual aid and an anti-authoritarian spirit that would allow them to carry on the fight. They overlaid the image of what the CNT had been at one time on its impoverished reality. The CNT also attracted many young people who had no interest in labor conflicts, who did not want a trade union but an “integral” organization, that is, a “general” organization devoted to addressing all social questions and fighting on all possible fronts against capitalism. Finally, in 1977, a whole series of “pro-autonomy” workerist groupuscules that emerged from the heat of the assemblies or parallel to them entered the CNT, all too confused and incapable of maintaining their own organizational identity, and therefore inclined to lay their eggs in someone else’s nest. They saw the still virgin syndicalism of the CNT as the “seed” of “workers autonomy”, a crypto-Leninist ideology of Italian origin; so true is it that the enemies of proletarian autonomy disguise themselves as its friends in order to more effectively combat it.

For all these reasons, the CNT’s growth after January 1977 was unstoppable, vast crowds attended all its meetings and rallies, numerous publications of a libertarian character appeared, and the CNT’s bureaucrats were exultant. In less than two years its membership had risen from a few thousand to 129,000. It would surpass 250,000 in 1978. The party of order (the employers association, the other trade unions and the State) was seriously concerned, since, on the eve of the signing of the Moncloa Accords, the September National Plenum of the CNT had proclaimed that the assembly was the only sovereign decision making body. According to the CNT report on the question, the trade union must limit its activities to support for and solidarity with strikes, rather than mediating them.

The CNT was not supposed to interpose itself between the employer and the workers, but to dissolve itself into the assemblies. The leaders of the established order, however, were soon able to breathe easy again, for the victory of the assembly movement was a Pyrrhic victory, since it was immediately followed by the counterattack of the orthodox trade union factions in the CNT — who subscribed to the ideological forms current during the Republic — unleashing a struggle for power that, beginning with the secretariat, affected all levels of the Organization, from the various committees to the highest directive bodies of the trade unions.

The Moncloa Accords prioritized a kind of “harmonizing” trade unionism that excluded all direct action and prohibited all generalization of struggles,

which were among the few points concerning which almost all the CNT members were in agreement. As a result, the CNT denounced the Moncloa Accords and boycotted the trade union elections, although many of its members were elected as “independent” candidates.

In any event, there was a considerable rate of abstention, but the UGT and the Workers Commissions needed only a little more than 10% of the eligible voters in order to represent the workers before the employers association and the government. The CNT was hoping that its marginalization from the enterprise committees and the labor contract negotiations would be compensated for by the mass mobilization of the workers. But with stakes this high — in January 1978 — the workers assembly movement was on the defensive and the mixed formulas of representative assembly-trade union committees, or trade union committees subject to assembly referendums, replaced the previous forms of direct democracy.

The CNT could no longer count on the initiative of the workers, which had been exhausted; furthermore, despite its growing membership, it had not yet led an important strike — it had not yet been tested. On the other hand, its power of attraction was no longer as strong as it was during the Libertarian surge; only ten thousand people attended the demonstration against the Moncloa Accords in Barcelona, despite the fact that the number of CNT members in that city had quadrupled. On that same day (January 15, 1978), the police provocation at the Scala nightclub took place. New confrontations were added to the current disputes over assemblies and integral organization, this time with regard to the trade union elections, the violent actions of minorities and the presence of armed groups that jeopardized the Organization. The power struggles between the various tendencies and personalities became so intense that the permanent secretariat had to be transferred from Madrid to Barcelona (April 1978).

From that point on, it was a constant feature of the CNT for the secretaries to utilize their positions to consolidate the power of their own factions and to reduce that of their competitors. Repeating a trend characteristic of counterrevolutionary periods, the most important positions were occupied by the worst people. Meanwhile, the assembly-based strikes came to an end and the influence of the assemblyists and the “integralists” within the organization declined, and the advocates of moderate syndicalism and electoral participation, most of whom were former “autonomists” who had since embraced an anti-anarchist revisionism, became more confident. Thanks to the Plenum system wherein only the organization’s officials participated without being responsible to either the assemblies of the militants or the numbers of members represented

by each official, the orthodox, christened the “FAI in Exile” or “the Founders” by their enemies, dominated the Organization. Even so, 150,000 copies of the journal *Ajoblanco* were printed at this time, an indication of the existence of widespread libertarian sympathies, although quite watered down, but membership was in precipitous decline. The petrol strike was the first, and last, strike led by the CNT, and it committed Hara-Kiri during this strike. Neither direct action, nor hard-nosed syndicalism; just governmental mediation and employers victory.

In 1979, resignations, expulsions, and dissolutions of trade unions continued without interruption; the factional struggles could not conceal the fact that the pendulum was swinging towards elections and open bureaucratic mediation. Cases like that of FIGA ²⁵ (vanguardist adventurism), *Askatasuna* ²⁶ (populist-nationalism) and the “Parallels” (trade unionist opportunism), highlighted the extent of the decomposition, especially among the latter tendency. In a climate of defeat the only kind of trade unionism that can function is bureaucratic trade unionism. For the “Parallels” — and for the electoralists in general — it was necessary to incorporate the CNT into the dominant trade union dynamic and to play the game of the UGT and the Workers Commissions or else become marginalized and sidelined not just with respect to the agreements with the employers and the government, but also with respect to official subsidies and financial assistance. This was the crux of the issue that was deliberated at the self-proclaimed Fifth Congress, held in December 1979 by an emaciated CNT that represented no more than thirty thousand members. The archaic ideology emerged victorious and the reformist minorities were sent packing, some towards the “majoritarian” trade unions and the others towards the reconstruction of a second workerist CNT of the same ilk. And over time, except for small circles that remained faithful to the classical ideology, which maintained the ownership of the acronyms and carried out a very limited activity under their shelter, the mass of militants either retired into private life, or returned to the fold of bureaucratic trade unionism, impotent and supine, which they had once supposedly sworn to oppose. If the adventures of ideology were tragic in the past, during the period of the “Transition” they acquired the characteristics of genuine farce. On this occasion anarchism and anarchosyndicalism did not reappear as the thought and the practice of the revolutionary movement of the working class prior to Francoism, but as an elementary mystification, an often comical display whose function was of

²⁵ *Federación Ibérica de Grupos Anarquistas*, “Iberian Federation of Anarchist Groups” — translator’s note.

²⁶ “Freedom” in Euskara, the language of the Basque Country, a Basque political party founded in 1998 and outlawed in 2009 — translator’s note.

course not to engage in a reevaluation of the lessons of past struggles, but to collaborate, after having dabbled on the *wild side*, in capitalist modernization. The contrast between the practice of the working class until 1977 and an almost absent revolutionary theory, or a “general expression, and nothing more, of the real historical movement” that was barely sketched in its general outlines, favored the development of ideology and bureaucracy. Both derived their power from the image of a revolutionary past with its contradictions so well concealed, like the alienating conditions of existence of the working classes. As a bulwark of the dominant lie they fostered a chatterbox syndicalism and a ridiculous fashion of contestation. The remnants of the radical proletariat were defeated a second time where they thought they could safely regroup.

The CNT fulfilled this second glorious role that history conceded to it, but it did not get its thirty pieces of silver. The cycle of workers bureaucracy ended with the defeat of the assemblyist proletariat and the filling of the ranks of spectacular representation with professional yellow trade unionists. The framework agreements and the Labor Law prohibited solidarity and assemblies, eliminating even the possibility of a semi-autonomous action concealed behind the enterprise committees, an incipient and imperfect form of trade union bureaucracy.

From that point forward there was only room for the neo-vertical trade unionism of the “cocos”²⁷ and the UGT. The extremely rare transgressions of the rules that would take place would not modify the deplorable panorama of resignation and submission.

As a consequence of this tremendous debacle, ideology in all its variants is once again open to challenge; memory was erased and both theoretical reflection as well as its praxis must traverse a vast desert — a kind of second exile — in order to once again connect with reality and history.

Miguel Amorós.

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Original text:

“Anarquismo teórico e ideología anarquista”

²⁷ CCOOs, *Comisiones Obreras*, “Workers Commissions”, founded by Communist Party members and Catholic trade unionists during the 1960s — translator’s note.

The Sick Society

We live dangerously. Danger is part of the lifestyle that has been imposed upon us, danger in the form of unexpected accidents, unforeseen illnesses, slow poisoning or sudden death, danger linked to the new technologies and, more concretely, to the morbid conditions of survival in late capitalism. Despite the alleged advances brought by what they call progress, never before has humanity lived amidst mountains of cement and wastes, nuclear power plants, chemical factories, genetically modified foods and industrial pollution. The outlook is not encouraging: out of control urbanization, destruction of the land, pollution of the air, the water and the soil, climate change, the hole in the ozone layer, noise, loneliness, confinement, sedentary lifestyles, air conditioners, industrial food ... all of which bring about extreme conditions that are not only optimal for the proliferation of diseases related to the deterioration of the immune system, but for the emergence of new, fatal epidemics linked to the lethal spread of previously benign viruses, or to simple poisoning and iatrogenic illnesses. As far as our leaders are concerned, this is the price the population has to pay in order to enjoy the fruits of technological-economic development. In fact, it is the essential precondition for the process of capitalist production, which is itself a process of the destruction of life. Illnesses accumulate along with capital and their management is a fundamental part of the system.

The sheer scale of the damage and the depth of the disaster are responsible for the fact that the situation is in many respects irreversible. The productive forces are eminently destructive forces and their incessant development only multiplies their catastrophic effects. We have crossed the threshold. This feeling of chaos and of having reached the point of no return is the basis of that dissatisfaction with life felt by so many humans, which assumes the form of addiction, substance abuse, anxiety, depression, hypertension and suicide. Consciousness subjected to atomization is so contaminated by the capitalist values that are broadcast without any possible reply by the media, that poverty seizes control of the mind as much as it does the body. The solution is offered from within the framework of the system that caused the problem, with a blanket of psycho-pharmaceuticals. Thus, each new generation of tranquilizers legitimates and reinforces the system, while the mental health of the population only gets worse. The disappearance of social consciousness is the most terrible

result of the sick society. It means that human beings lack the effective psychic mechanisms required for the protection of their persons from the repeated, increasingly more hostile and aggressive assaults of the capitalist environment, and can perceive no other way to respond except brutalization or illness. The extremely widespread compulsive consumption of medicine is the most obvious form assumed by this trend. A parallel process takes place with the mechanisms of physical self-defense, which are just as precarious due to the harmful effects of the environment and pernicious diets, which, when combined with psychological damage, lead to cardiovascular complications, the cause of one-third of deaths, immunodeficiencies, diabetes, asthma, lung disorders, most cancers and the new illnesses whose etiologies are still unknown and which have been given the name of "syndromes". Pollution causes ten times more deaths than traffic accidents.

Cancer is a metaphor for capital, which embeds itself in the social fabric and incessantly accumulates until it leads to the death of the patient. It is the typical disease of industrialized society; one out of three humans will eventually be diagnosed with cancer and, despite the capital that has been invested in research on cancer, its progression is unstoppable even among the young. Any moderately informed person can point to its environmental causes, that is, to nuclear and electromagnetic radiation, the chemical substances in our foods or that contaminate our surroundings, and psychological traumas. While living near a nuclear power plant multiplies your risk of cancer by a factor of ten, we should not overlook the relation between brain tumors and leukemia and radar, television and cell phone antennas, or the relation between skin cancer and the hole in the ozone layer. You do not have to have lynx eyes to know that living near industrial zones entails real risks of developing genetic anomalies and lymphomas. As a result of doing something as ordinary as just repeatedly passing through polluted metropolitan urban areas (all of them are polluted) one runs a higher risk of getting lung cancer than tobacco smokers. The effects of the thousands of compounds that the chemical and pharmaceutical industries foist upon us each year are entirely unknown, but we do know that numerous pesticides, plastics, fuels, drugs, and food additives and preservatives are carcinogenic. And these compounds are found everywhere: in toys, food, ceramics, packaging, electrical materials, insulation, cosmetics, textiles, computers, CDs, etc. Some are also hormone disruptors, allergens or immunosuppressors. Others are simply poisonous, susceptible to military uses, responsible for syndromes like that of the "toxic oil" (an organophosphate pesticide) or the decline of the bee population (a neurotoxin). Finally, certain manic-depressive, obsessive, ultracompetitive or repressed patients have a

higher than average likelihood of developing tumors. These latter cases reflect forms of decline of the personality triggered by the prevailing psychological conditions that nourish self-denial. Besides this latter condition, the chemical and nuclear industries are the primary factors responsible for the devastation of the immunological self-defense mechanisms. This trend is intimately connected to industrial food, the concentration of the population in megacities, the production of energy, the manufacture of medicines, the system of wage labor and the consumerist lifestyle. It cannot be altered without dealing with the entire edifice, the whole dominant system. For example, the destruction of the land wrought by deforestation or urbanization compels the further increase of monoculture, with the concomitant increase in pesticides and artificial fertilizers, the further development of Genetically Modified Organisms and the squandering of energy, with their sequels of pollution, disappearance of traditional cultures, release of greenhouse gases, promiscuity and infectious diseases. The economy always reacts the same way, aggravating the harm it has already done. Urban expansion generates an increase in mobility and consequently a rise in the demand for fuels, which causes a rise in the price of oil, which is used to justify the construction of new nuclear power plants. Massive cattle yards, global warming and unnatural feeds facilitate the spread of diseases among animals (swine fever, bluetongue disease) and their spread to humans (avian flu, bovine spongiform encephalopathy), which trigger panic and in turn stimulate the pharmaceutical industry, which sells its new prescription drugs to the national health programs and creates new jobs. The unprecedented production of wastes fill the landscape with black holes of high toxicity but also generate a major recycling, treatment and waste management industry, whose treatment facilities, dumps and incinerators continue to spread pollution (particularly dioxins) and contribute to acid rain, although within the limits of certain "security" zones conceded by the ruling economic interests, a National Waste Plan is enforced; which is not the case, however, for the waste that is exported to the poor countries. And so it continues without respite.

Society is sick of capitalism and any cure must involve the eradication of the latter. To fight disease it is not enough to dissimulate the symptoms. This has been the shortcoming of environmentalism. The problem can only be resolved by the construction of communities, that is, social groups without commercial relations. These communities must be self-sufficient, that is, they must function outside of the market, allowing for a certain degree of direct satisfaction of real needs and resisting the manipulation of desires. But this is not enough, it is only the starting point, the terrain upon which the new dangerous classes born from the breakdown of capitalist society, the dangerous classes that must abolish the

market and the State, have to be based in order to heal themselves. We have to get out in order to fight our way forward. This can be our motto.

Miguel Amorós

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“Sociedad enferma”



Miguel Amorós (photo Victor Arias), may 2023.

This **first volume** (1984-2008) is available at:
<https://archive.org/details/amoros-interventions-v1-en>

The **second volume** (2009-2014) is available at:
<https://archive.org/details/amoros-interventions-v2-en>

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The complete list of English texts by M. Amoros
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We live in hard times, in which the past is incommunicable. The survivors from the older generations are incapable of passing on the experience of their defeats and their victories to young rebels because the latter are living in such different conditions of existence that the old truths no longer apply. The older generation has no descendants, and today's generation has no ancestors. Capitalism and industrial civilization have created an artificial environment where people without memories undergo changes at a dizzying speed. These changes take place so fast that they leave the very notion of change behind; the idea of time is therefore also lost. Every fifteen or twenty years one has to start all over again from scratch. The dead were buried long before the new generation could succumb to the temptation of venerating their memory. The revolution does not take its poetry from the past, but it cannot draw its poetry from the future, either. We are installed in a perpetual present, in which the old defeated projects of emancipation and the preposterous ideologies born from their failure walk the same road.

Free price